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## **The Pursuit of Padania: Or the sacralization of a political entity - Lega Nord 1989-2001**

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### **Citation**

Eyt, S. (2022). *The Pursuit of Padania: Or the sacralization of a political entity - Lega Nord 1989-2001*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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# The Pursuit of Padania

Or the sacralization of a political entity – Lega Nord 1989-2001



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This thesis is submitted for the degree of *Master of Arts*

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*Wordcount: 24935*  
*EC: 30*

2022

## ***Table of Contents***

<b><i>Acknowledgement/Dankwoord</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<i>Interpreting Lega</i> .....	8
<i>Difficulties of terminology: a sacralization of politics</i> .....	13
<i>Sources, approach and structure</i> .....	15
<b><i>Chapter 1: 1989-1995</i></b> .....	<b>21</b>
<i>Clientelism, corruption and the rise of Lega</i> .....	21
<i>Italian identity and Northern ethnicity</i> .....	23
<i>Enemies</i> .....	26
<i>Unity of the North and ceremony and ritual</i> .....	28
<b><i>Chapter 2: 1995-2001</i></b> .....	<b>33</b>
<i>Secessionism and Padanian institutions</i> .....	33
<i>Enemies</i> .....	36
<i>What is Padania?</i> .....	42
<i>Padanian history</i> .....	44
<i>Freedom for the promised land</i> .....	48
<i>Ceremony and ritual</i> .....	52
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b><i>Literature</i></b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b><i>Sources</i></b> .....	<b>70</b>

## ***Acknowledgement/Dankwoord***

Deze scriptie heeft een aanzienlijk grotere omvang gekregen dan ik aanvankelijk had vermoed. Dat dit project eveneens langer heeft geduurd dan verwacht is een gegeven. Wat enorm heeft geholpen is de steun die ik van anderen gedurende dit proces heb ervaren. Op de eerste plaats de sturende hand van mijn begeleider dr. Eric Storm bij het bieden van structuur en het schetsen van de grove lijnen van het verhaal. Mijn dank wil ik eveneens uitdrukken richting Marijn en Sam die naast hun morele steun mijn stuk ook van voor tot achter hebben gelezen en becommentarieerd door alle stadia van het project. Dank ook aan Lidewij en Alex die met hun oog voor detail mijn analyse meer op de voorgrond hebben doen treden. Daarnaast wil ik Xaveer bedanken voor zijn focus op de taal van het verhaal. Tot slot wil ik mijn partner, Carmen, bedanken voor haar niet aflatende steun, zodat ik door kon blijven gaan en gestructureerd mijn werkzaamheden wist voort te zetten.

## *Introduction*

In 1989 several local political parties from northern Italy came together to form an alliance named *Lega Nord* – the Northern League (1989-1991). The most popular of which were *Lega Lombarda* – Lombard League – and *Liga Veneta* – Venetian League. In 1991, out of the previous alliance and with *Lega Lombarda* at its axis, a new federation was born which was also known as *Lega Nord* or simply *Lega*.<sup>1</sup> On 20 May 1990 members of *Lega Lombarda*, recently elected to local Italian councils, swore an oath at Pontida, a municipality in northern Italy. An oath not to the Italian state, but to the freedom of northern Italy.

Today at Pontida, the years of our commitment to the freedom of our peoples are joined to the sacrifices of the ancestors who chose this place to swear their commitment in defense of freedom.

I who wanted to put myself forward as a candidate on the lists of the Lombard League – Northern League to become an active standard-bearer in the struggle for the autonomy of the Lombard, Veneto, Piedmontese, Ligurian, Emilian, Romagnolo and Tuscan people, I join my oath to that of the ancestors: I swear loyalty to the cause of the autonomy and the freedom of our peoples, which today, as for 1000 years, are embodied in the Lombard League and in its democratically elected governing bodies.<sup>2</sup>

Why did these recently elected members swear this precise oath and to what end? Pontida was an important place for *Lega*. It was allegedly here that in 1167 a first oath was pronounced by a group of municipalities from present-day Lombardy that created the *Lega Lombarda* – from which the more recent movement took its name – to defend their independence against Frederic Barbarossa, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. By pronouncing the oath again in 1990, the newly elected members supposedly created a direct link with the past – uncorrupted by time.<sup>3</sup> Like the twelfth-century movement, the twentieth-century party came together at Pontida, precisely because it was this place that – in their view – functioned as a symbol for a single mission: liberating the northern Italian region from ‘oppression’. Based on this premise, *Lega*’s goal was some form of autonomy for northern Italy.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, the newly elected members swore an oath to this northern Italy – a region that was later christened Padania by *Lega*. The oath was designed on the premise that ‘the North’ – a flexible concept, but mainly centered around the Po Valley and part of the Alps – was made up of communities distinct from those in the center and south of Italy, and should therefore enjoy some level of autonomy. According to *Lega* these communities, although different from each other, had a lot in common: they shared a history, heroes, martyrs, values and traditions. This was the basis of a Northern/Padanian identity, ready to serve a new ‘nation’ and ‘state’: Padania. However, Padania never existed

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Cento Bull and Mark Gilbert, *The Lega Nord and the northern question in Italian politics*, (Basingstoke, 2001), 20, 21; No author, ‘7/8/9 dicembre 1989 1° congresso di segrete “congresso nazionale” - nasce la Lega Nord’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, <[https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia\\_ln/02\\_lega\\_nord\\_storia88\\_95.pdf](https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia_ln/02_lega_nord_storia88_95.pdf)> [accessed 06 May 2019], 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> No author, ‘20 maggio 1990: Giuramento a Pontida’ *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 8, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Elena Percivaldi, ‘Il giuramento di Pontida tra leggenda e realtà’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:16, 45-54, here: 45, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Duncan McDonnell, ‘A weekend in Padania: Regionalist Populism and the Lega Nord’, *Politics* (2006), 26:2, 126-132, here: 127; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord and the northern question in Italian politics*, 61.

geographically or historically – although the term Padania had been around since the 1970s to describe the cooperation between the regions of the Po Valley. Lega attempted to construct Padania and invent a congruent identity. In the hands of Lega, Padania ‘became *the* symbol of northern unity.’<sup>5</sup> The party argued that the Padanian nation had always existed, although mostly underneath the surface. I contend that a nation – different from a state – has to be an ideal beyond the sum of its individual members. It has to be legitimized by gaining a sacred aura steeped in history and myth, and complemented by heroes and shared values.<sup>6</sup>

It is this sacred aura Lega created around the new nation which is the object of this thesis. I argue that Lega tried to instill a sense of unity in an area that before its arrival onto the political stage was neither a state nor a community. To do this, Lega tried to create a *political religion* – meaning Lega aimed to involve itself in all aspects of its followers’ lives, and present them with a sense of community and purpose. The story (history) Lega told, and the symbols, myths and liturgy it used played an essential part in the development of this political religion. Within this setting, the creation of a symbolically ‘independent’ Padanian state with its own institutions was an important part. To better understand these modern political movements, it is essential to get insight into how they constructed this sense of sacralized identity and nation. This thesis therefore asks the question: to what extent does Lega turn itself and its creation of the Padanian nation into a political religion between 1989 and 2001? Additionally, it differentiates between how Lega did this and whether it was successful, while distinguishing between its hard-core supporters – the militants that stood by Lega no matter what – and the general voter.

The time frame was chosen because in 1989 Lega was formed out of several smaller parties and during that year the Lega Nord electoral coalition for the European elections went from marginal to increasingly successful. In 2001 the party faced a whole range of new challenges, entering the Second Berlusconi government as a coalition partner and having to strike a balance between being in government and their commitment to changing the state.<sup>7</sup>

*Lega Autonoma Lombarda* (in 1986 renamed *Lega Lombarda*) was the principal party of the Lega Nord. In 1982 Umberto Bossi – who would become the leader of Lega Lombarda and later of Lega Nord – published a manifest that laid the basis for the foundation of the party in 1984.<sup>8</sup> Lega Autonoma Lombarda quickly gathered support in the second half of the 1980s, especially in the ‘Third

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<sup>5</sup> Margarita Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, ‘A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics? Understanding the Rise of the Northern question in the 1990s’, *South European Society and Politics* (2000), 5:3, 80-107, here: 86. Italics by me, SE. See also Benito Giordano, ‘Italian regionalism or “Padanian” nationalism – the political project of the Lega Nord in Italian politics’, *Political Geography* (2000), 19:4, 445-471, here: 446.

<sup>6</sup> Joost Augusteijn, Patrick Dassen and Maartje Janse, ‘Concluding Remarks’, in: Joost Augusteijn, Patrick Dassen and Maartje Janse (ed.), *Political Religion beyond totalitarianism: the sacralization of politics in the age of democracy* (Basingstoke, 2013), 255-260, here: 259, 260.

<sup>7</sup> Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, ‘A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics? Understanding the Rise of the Northern question in the 1990s’, 94; Eve Hepburn, ‘Introduction: Re-conceptualizing Sub-state Mobilization’, *Regional and Federal Studies* (2009), 19:4-5, 477-499, here: 479; Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, ‘The Lega Nord in the second Berlusconi government: in a league of its own’, *West European Politics* (2005), 28:5, 952-972, here: 953.

<sup>8</sup> Astrid Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics: A Case Study of the Lega Nord* (Masterthesis, Webster University St. Louis, 2010), 10.

Italy'. This was the industrialized periphery of northern Italy – a perceived socio-economically homogeneous zone, with a concentration of small and medium-sized firms that were highly specialized industrially and internationally competitive.<sup>9</sup> The party gained visibility in 1985 when it obtained 2.5% of the votes in the province of Varese. In 1987 it entered the national elections, running in the Lombard region and winning 2.7% of the votes. As a result, Bossi joined the senate. In 1989 it got 6.5% of the vote in the European elections and 16.4% in the 1990 regional elections.<sup>10</sup> Lega Lombarda started working together with other regional northern parties and after successfully collaborating during the 1989 European elections, Lega Lombarda and five other leagues created a confederal alliance named *Lega Nord*. In February 1991 the confederation became a federation with the same name. Theoretically, each league had a high degree of autonomy, but in reality, Bossi ruled the party with an iron fist.<sup>11</sup>

Where during the 1980s Lega's policies mainly focused on the protection of the local population and culture, by the early 1990s it had shifted to privatization, tax cuts and immigration control. In addition, it presented federalism as the solution for most of the north's problems.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence of its shifted focus Lega's appeal increased. By the 1992 general elections, Lega Nord took 8.7% of the national vote for the Chamber of Deputies and 8.2% for the senate. In Lombardy alone it had 20% of the vote.<sup>13</sup> In 1994 Lega started working together with Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*. As the latter won the elections, Lega subsequently gained a position within the government – even though its share of the vote had dropped 0.3% since 1992.<sup>14</sup> Due to several difficulties Bossi faced, Lega pulled the plug after only eight months of being in government, quickly broke all ties with Forza Italia and moved to secessionism.<sup>15</sup> Lega's independence stance was strengthened by the 1996 general elections, in which it gained 10% of the overall vote – the highest percentage in its history. Lega

<sup>9</sup> Benito Giordano, 'A Place Called Padania? The Lega Nord and the Political representation of Northern Italy', *European Urban and Regional Studies* (1999), 6:3, 215-230, here: 218, 225; Michel Huyseune, 'Masculinity and secessionism in Italy: an assessment', *Nations and Nationalism* (2000), 6:4, 591-610, here: 599; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 2, 16, 73-75.

<sup>10</sup> In the 1990 elections the Lega Lombarda received almost 19% (1.18 million) of the votes in Lombardy. Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 21; Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriale, 'Regionali 06/05/1990, Area Italia, Regione Lombardia', *Archivio Storico delle Elezioni*,

<<https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=R&dtel=06/05/1990&tpa=I&tp=R&lev0=0&levsut0=0&lev1=3&levsut1=1&nel=3&es0=S&es1=S&ms=S>> [accessed 22 April 2019]. See also Carlo Ruzza and Stefano Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right: Territorial politics, populism and 'post-fascism'*, (London, New York; 2009), 64; Joseph Farrell and Carl Levy, 'The Northern League: Conservative Revolution', in: Carl Levy (ed.), *Italian Regionalism: History, Identity and Politics* (Oxford, Washington D.C., 1996), 131-150, here: 135; Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics: A Case Study of the Lega Nord*, 11; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 4, 10, 54, 72, 73, 80, 81; Anna Cento Bull, 'Collective Identities: From the Politics of Inclusion to the Politics of Ethnicity and Difference', *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* (2003), 2:3-4, 41-54, here: 46; Dwayne Woods, 'The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration in Italy and the Rise of Regional Populism: The Lombard League', *Comparative Politics* (1995), 27:2, 187-203, here: 197.

<sup>11</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 20, 21, 121-123; Percy Allum and Ilvo Diamanti, 'The Autonomous Leagues in the Veneto', in: Carl Levy (ed.), *Italian Regionalism: History, Identity and Politics* (Oxford, Washington D.C., 1996), 151-169, here: 161.

<sup>12</sup> Farrell and Levy, 'The Northern League: Conservative Revolution', 132, 140; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 10, 43; Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 37, 38; Gomez-Reino Cachafero, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 94.

<sup>13</sup> Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right: Territorial politics, populism and 'post-fascism'*, 64; Farrell and Levy, 'The Northern League', 135; Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Farrell and Levy, 'The Northern League', 135, 136. Also see William Brierley and Luca Giacometti, 'Italian national identity and the Failure of Regionalism', in: Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos (ed.), *Nation & Identity in Contemporary Europe* (London, New York; 1996, 2005, eBook), 161-185, here: 181.

<sup>15</sup> Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 28, 29; Pepijn Corduwener and Arthur Weststeyn, *Proeftuin Italië: Hoe het mooiste land van Europa de moderne politiek uivond*, (Amsterdam, 2018), 231.

subsequently proclaimed the symbolic independence of the North from Italy.<sup>16</sup> The tide had however turned by 1997, when the party lost many votes in local elections – from 40% (1993) to 15% – and already in May 1998 Bossi spoke of devolution (a *de facto* return to federalism) rather than secession.<sup>17</sup> This was not yet a turn-around of Lega’s position, and it was not until July 1999 – after gaining only 4,5% of the votes in the European elections – that devolution began to play a significant role in Lega’s political agenda.<sup>18</sup> Within this framework, Bossi remade his pact with Berlusconi – although talks had already been initiated as early as 1997.<sup>19</sup>

In the 2001 general elections, Lega gained just 3.9% of the vote. Even though its percentage had fallen, as it was part of the winning coalition – Forza Italia individually got almost 30% of the vote – Lega became part of the government once more.<sup>20</sup> Lega’s focus on, among other things, the local population, immigration and the strong position of its leader has led many researchers to argue that Lega is a populist party. It is nevertheless just one of four mainstream interpretations, which are discussed in the next section.

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<sup>16</sup> Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali, ‘Camera 21/04/1996, Area Italia’, *Archivio Storico delle Elezioni*, <<https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=C&dtel=21/04/1996&tpa=I&tpe=A&lev0=0&levsut0=0&es0=S&ms=S>> [accessed 14 July 2020]; Giordano, ‘Italian regionalism or “Padanian” nationalism – the political project of the Lega Nord in Italian politics’, 456.

<sup>17</sup> Benito Giordano, ‘The continuing transformation of Italian politics and the contradictory fortunes of the Lega Nord’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* (2003), 8:2, 216-230, here: 221; Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, ‘Separati in Casa? The Lega Nord in government’, (Paper presented to the 54<sup>th</sup> *Political Studies Association Annual Conference* 5-8 April 2004 – University of Lincoln), 1-22, here: 15; No author, ‘31 maggio 1998 - Pontida: Nuovo Appuntamento’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, <[https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia\\_In/03\\_lega\\_nord\\_storia96\\_98.pdf](https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia_In/03_lega_nord_storia96_98.pdf)> [accessed 06 May 2019], 32, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriale, ‘Europee 13/06/1999, Area Italia’, *Archivio Storico delle Elezioni*, <<https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=E&dtel=13/06/1999&tpa=I&tpe=A&lev0=0&levsut0=0&es0=S&ms=S>> [accessed 22 July 2020]; No author, ‘30 luglio 1999: Consiglio Federale – a settembre: “Proposta di Parlamento del Nord”’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Quarta Parte 1999*, <[https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia\\_In/04\\_lega\\_nord\\_storia1999.pdf](https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia_In/04_lega_nord_storia1999.pdf)> [accessed 06 May 2019], 24; No author, ‘25 agosto 1999: Pronta la devolution Padana’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Quarta Parte 1999*, 24; No author, ‘4 settembre 1999: Dieta di Acqui Terme – la doppia via che porta alla devolution’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Quarta Parte 1999*, 25; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 134, 135.

<sup>19</sup> No author, ‘13 febbraio 2000: Bergamo - 30.000 “No” Ai Clandestini’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Quinta Parte 2000*, <[https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia\\_In/05\\_lega\\_nord\\_storia2000.pdf](https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia_In/05_lega_nord_storia2000.pdf)> [accessed 06 May 2019], 3-4, here: 4; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 134, 135; Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 14, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriale, ‘Camera 13/05/2001, Area Italia’, *Archivio Storico delle Elezioni*, <<https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=C&dtel=13/05/2001&tpa=I&tpe=A&lev0=0&levsut0=0&es0=S&ms=S>> [accessed 22 April 2019]; No author, ‘15 Maggio 2001: Elezioni Politiche – E’ Vittoria! Ma A Caro Prezzo’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Sesta Parte 2001*, <[https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia\\_In/06\\_lega\\_nord\\_storia2001.pdf](https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/storia_In/06_lega_nord_storia2001.pdf)> [accessed 06 May 2019], 12; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 184, 185.



### *Interpreting Lega*

Lega has been interpreted in many different ways by various political scientists and sociologists: as a protest party, as a populist party, as a subcultural party, as an ethno-regionalist/ -nationalist party, or a combination of all the above. It has been difficult to pinpoint the party and it has therefore been referred to as ‘the chameleon party’ hinting at its ability to transform its political objectives and language, to reinvent itself to gain and keep support.<sup>21</sup> The interpretations were developed more or less simultaneously and shed light on different parts of Lega and its transforming capacities. In their 2001 book *The Lega Nord and the northern question in Italian politics*, historians Anna Cento Bull and Mark Gilbert created a division between several interpretations that provides the basic structure for this section. This thesis adds more recent academic literature and a final interpretation.

According to Cento Bull and Gilbert, a first and early interpretation designated Lega as a protest party. This interpretation explained Lega’s success as a movement against the old political parties and the Italian political system. It knew proponents such as political scientist Dwayne Woods who in 1992 wrote an article on the rise of the regional leagues. Cento Bull and Gilbert argue that although this view holds some merit during the party’s entrance onto the political stage at a time of disruption of the Italian political system – caused by *Tangentopoli* (the discovery and subsequent prosecution of large-scale institutional corruption by government officials, politicians and even collusion with the mafia in the early 1990s) and the collapse of communism – that led to the end of the First Republic, it does not explain the ongoing success of Lega throughout the 1990s.<sup>22</sup>

A second interpretation that Cento Bull and Gilbert discern argues that Lega is a populist party. At its core, populism juxtaposes ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’, with the latter frustrating the legitimate demands of the former. The literature argues that populism can be combined with other ideologies, like socialism or nationalism, and thereby be inclusive or exclusive.<sup>23</sup> It leads too far to discuss the possible variations, yet it suffices to add that some scholars argue that populism describes ‘the people’ as a virtuous, homogeneous and sovereign community with historic roots, a homeland that the group has inhabited through time, common values and a culture that should be protected, that can triumph over its enemies and which has an important role for the populist party and its leader.<sup>24</sup> According to Cento

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<sup>21</sup> Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 2, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert point to other proponents like political scientists Martin Bull and James Newell – in a short 1993 article on the changes in Italian politics – and political scientist Patrick McCarthy – in a 1993 book on the changes in Italian politics. Dwayne Woods, ‘The Centre No Longer Holds: The Rise of Regional Leagues in Italian Politics’, *West European Politics* (1992), 15:2, 56-76, here: 58; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 43, 44.

<sup>23</sup> See the work by Margaraet Canovan (1981) and more recently by De Cleen and Stavrakakis, De Cleen, and Woods, Ivaldi and Lanzone. Margaret Canovan, *Populism*, (New York, London; 1981), 13, 294-298; Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Distinctions and articulations: a discourse theoretical framework for the study of populism and nationalism’, *Javnost-The Public* (2017), 24:4, 301-319, here: 310; Benjamin De Cleen, ‘The populist political logic and the analysis of the discursive construction of “the people” and “the elite”’, in: Jan Zienkowski and Ruth Breeze (ed.), *Imagining the Peoples of Europe: Populist discourses across the political spectrum* (eBook, 2019), 19-42, here: 28, 37, 38; Gilles Ivaldi, Maria Elisabetta Lanzone and Dwayne Woods, ‘Varieties of Populism across a Left-Right Spectrum: The Case of the Front National, the Northern League, Podemos and Five Star Movement’, *Swiss Political Science Review* (2017), 23:4, 354-376, here: 355, 356, 359.

<sup>24</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, ‘Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre’, in: Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (ed.), *Twenty-First Century Populism* (Basingstoke, New York; 2008), 1-11, here: 3-7; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 45, 46; Dwayne Woods, ‘The Many Faces of Populism in Italy: The Northern League and Berlusconiism’, in: Dwayne Woods and Barbara Wejnert (ed.), *The Many Faces of Populism: Current Perspectives* (Volume 22 of *Research in political sociology*) (eBook, Bingley; 2014), 27-51,

Bull and Gilbert, sociologist Roberto Biorcio was one of the first to label Lega as a populist party in a 1991 book chapter on Lega Lombarda, and others followed suit.<sup>25</sup> This view has several proponents, such as political scientist Duncan McDonnell who wrote a 2006 article on Lega as a regionalist-populist party, political sociologist Carlo Ruzza and political scientist Stefano Fella in a 2009 book on the Italian Right, and Woods who wrote a 2014 contribution on the role of identity in Lega's populism. Woods argued that according to Lega the identity of the people had to be protected, and the party presented itself as the only legitimate representative of the people. Lega created a new identity, centered around the people of the North, who were considered industrious and hard-working, while being exploited by a corrupt elite in Rome.<sup>26</sup> While identity is given an important role within the populist line of thought, the focus is not on how this identity was constructed. This is part of the following interpretation.

A third interpretation distinguished by Cento Bull and Gilbert argues that Lega represented a subculture. In a 1996 book chapter on Lega, Cento Bull quotes the concept as it was defined by sociologists Arnaldo Bagnasco and Carlo Trigilia in two case studies on Italy. It refers to an area 'dominated by a specific political tradition, where a complex network of institutions [...] are well rooted in the local society and of the same politico-ideological origins'.<sup>27</sup> In a 1998 article political scientist Patrizia Messina adds that there was also an extensive associative network.<sup>28</sup>

Cento Bull and Gilbert state that in the early 1990s, researchers like Biorcio and P. Natale argued that during the 1980s Lega started to appropriate many of the features of the weakening Christian subculture, which was dominant in the north-east of Italy and tied to the congruent political party – the Christian Democrats (DC) – and built a new type of solidarity and collective identity.<sup>29</sup> Immigrants and the central state were its adversaries. In addition, it focused on local values and Lega created an organizational network, grounding the party in the local community.<sup>30</sup> In a 1996 chapter on Lega and Italian national identity, linguist William Brierley and political scientist Luca Giacometti argue that

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here: 32; John Agnew and Michael Shin, 'Spatializing Populism: Taking Politics to the People in Italy', *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* (2017), 107:4, 915, 933, here: 919.

<sup>25</sup> Marco Tarchi, 'Recensioni', *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* (1994), 24:2, 349-351, here: 349; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 46-51.

<sup>26</sup> Other proponents of McDonnell's position are political scientist Davide Vampa who wrote a 2016 chapter with McDonnell on Lega in an edited volume on populist parties, as well as political geographers John Agnew and Michel Shin who wrote a 2017 article on populism in Italy. McDonnell, 'A weekend in Padania: Regionalist Populism and the Lega Nord', 126, 127, 128, 130; Duncan McDonnell and Davide Vampa, 'The Italian Lega Nord', in: Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni (ed.), *Understanding Populist Party Organisation: The Radical Right in Western Europe*, (London, 2016), 105-129, here: 106, 110; Agnew and Shin, 'Spatializing Populism: Taking Politics to the People in Italy', 917, 918, 925. Another proponent of Ruzza and Fella's position is political scientist Gianluca Passarelli who wrote a 2013 article on Lega. Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 44, 82, 101, 102; Gianluca Passarelli, 'Extreme right parties in Western Europe: the case of the Italian Northern League', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* (2013), 18:1, 53-71, here: 66. Other proponents of Woods' position are political scientists Gilles Ivaldi and Maria Elisabetta Lanzone, who wrote a 2017 article on variations of populism, together with Woods. Woods, 'The Many Faces of Populism in Italy: The Northern League and Berlusconi', 33, 36; Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods, 'Varieties of Populism across a Left-Right Spectrum: The Case of the Front National, the Northern League, Podemos and Five Star Movement', 361-363, 365.

<sup>27</sup> Carlo Trigilia, *Grandi partiti e piccole imprese: Comunisti democristiani nelle regioni a economia diffusa*, (Bologna, 1986), 13, quoted in Anna Cento Bull, 'Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League', in: Carl Levy (ed.), *Italian Regionalism: History, Identity and Politics* (Oxford, Washington D.C.; 1996), 171-187, here: 178.

<sup>28</sup> Patrizia Messina, 'Opposition in Italy in the 1990s: Local Political Cultures and the Northern League', *Government and Opposition* (1998), 33:4, 462-478, here: 465. See also page 473 by Messina for a more in-depth example. Messina, 'Opposition in Italy in the 1990s: Local Political Cultures and the Northern League', 473.

<sup>29</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 51, 53, 54.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, 53.

Lega developed an exclusive and purely territorial collective identity, the ‘Lombard ethnîe’, to attack other cultures and the centralist state in particular.<sup>31</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert state that even though there is an emphasis on the continuity of a collective identity, Lega’s political project within this interpretation remains unclear.<sup>32</sup> The next interpretation sheds more light on this.

The fourth interpretation that Cento Bull and Gilbert discern is that Lega is an ethno-regionalist or/-nationalist party. They state that political scientist Huri Türsan in a 1998 chapter on ethno-regionalist parties argues that there are two important elements, firstly a subnational territorial border and secondly an exclusive group identity.<sup>33</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert contend that Woods in a 1995 article on the rise of Lega Lombarda was one of the first to argue that Lega was an ethno-regionalist party. According to Woods Lega created ‘a new political movement out of alienated and dissatisfied voters’ and built a regional identity that ought to challenge the central state, constructed out of ‘long-standing, albeit changed, subcultural identifications’.<sup>34</sup> More recently, a 2005 article on Lega by political scientists Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell argues that Lega employs ethno-regionalist rhetoric, in which it juxtaposes the territory, interests and identity of the north (honest, hard-working and attached to their local traditions) with the Italian state.<sup>35</sup> In a 2013 article political scientist Gianluca Passarelli contends that it was not just rhetoric, but Lega in fact ‘established itself by addressing existing territorial issues, by stressing the differences among Italian regions and by reviving emphasis on an ethnic, subnational cleavage.’<sup>36</sup>

Astrid Callegaro uses the concept of ethno-regionalism differently in her 2010 master’s thesis. She delves into the matter of territorial identity and describes the different phases in Lega’s development through the lens of ethnic-identity policy. She makes a distinction between ethnic-regionalism – during the early 1990s, when Lega requested federalism – and ethnic-nationalism – during the later 1990s, when Lega Nord demanded secession. Callegaro used this distinction as a scale to differentiate between moderation and radicalization.<sup>37</sup> She applies the same logic to differentiate between statements made at a national level (ethnic-regionalist) and inwards, towards its constituency (ethnic-nationalist).<sup>38</sup> In fact, Callegaro argues that through ethnic-nationalism Lega stimulated its political project. This meant that the party promoted myths, symbols and a romanticized and ethnic history of a new nation, Padania, to create a new political culture.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, while the goal was

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<sup>31</sup> Brierley and Giacometti, ‘Italian national identity and the Failure of Regionalism’, 172, 173.

<sup>32</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 55, 56.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 56.

<sup>34</sup> Woods, ‘The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration in Italy and the Rise of Regional Populism: The Lombard League’, 195, 201. See also Woods, ‘The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration’, 196; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 57, 58.

<sup>35</sup> Albertazzi and McDonnell, ‘The Lega Nord in the second Berlusconi government: In a league of its own’, 961, 968.

<sup>36</sup> Passarelli, ‘Extreme right parties in Western Europe: the case of the Italian Northern League’, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 28. The ethno-nationalist position is reiterated by Ruzza and Fella, although according to them from the mid-1990s onwards there was also an extreme-right undertone that through time became more prominent and outspoken thereby moving away from ethno-nationalism. Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 82, 90.

<sup>38</sup> Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 28, 29. Ruzza and Fella also argue that statements made towards the activists are ethno-nationalist, see Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 98.

<sup>39</sup> Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 29, 30.

always some form of self-determination, Lega needed to keep the needs of its constituency in mind.<sup>40</sup> Therefore ethnic-nationalism was withheld on purpose by Lega to be more accessible to a wider audience.<sup>41</sup> In the end, Callegaro contends that it was rhetoric and strategy which guided Lega towards secession.<sup>42</sup>

Callegaro uses Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolist theory, which is part of a much larger debate on what constitutes a nation and nationalism, and it is important to be aware of the debate to understand the limited success of Lega's nation-making project in the second half of the 1990s. The debate is between those who argue that nations have ancient roots (ethno-symbolism) and those that argue that nations are recent inventions (modernism). According to the former and with Smith as its proponent, if a nation wants to be successful 'narratives and images of the nation [have to] strike a chord with the people to whom they are designed to appeal'.<sup>43</sup> Smith contends that nationalism does not work if it is based on pure inventions, because people will not respond to it.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, modernists – like Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm – argue that nations are a novel phenomenon. Anderson argues that nationalism is a constructed narrative and the nation is imagined, while Hobsbawm debates his point from the concept of *invented traditions*, 'a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past', applied to the nation and nationalism and which consists of festivals, ceremonies, flags, anthems, symbols, myths, rituals and histories that were deliberately constructed from above during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century.<sup>45</sup> He nevertheless adds that 'popular resonance' was an important necessity for invented traditions to function.<sup>46</sup> It is the issue of narratives that have to strike a chord with the people as well as popular resonance, that was a recurring concern for Lega, especially in the second half of the 1990s. This is discussed in chapters one and two.

Taking from this overview of studies, the contention is not so much on what Lega *is*. It can be reasoned that during the 1980s and 1990s Lega Lombarda and later Lega Nord acted in accordance with most of the interpretations. It behaved like a protest party during the initial phase against the old political culture and -system which crumbled with the political parties alongside it. Lega can equally be termed a

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<sup>40</sup> Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 62, 63.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, 38, 39, 71.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: theory, ideology, history* (Cambridge, Malden; 2001, 2010), 89. Smith argues that the concept of *ethnic* refers to 'a named human community connected to a homeland, possessing common myths of ancestry, shared memories, one or more elements of shared culture, and a measure of solidarity'. See Smith, *Nationalism: theory, ideology, history*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Nationalism: theory, ideology, history*, 126, 127.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (New York, 1983, 2013), 1-14, here: 4, 6, 7, 12. See also Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, (New York; 1990, 1992, 2013), 10. For the constructivist interpretation by Anderson see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London, New York; 1983, 1991, 2003), 4, 6, 7, 204-206. For a brief overview of the constructivist interpretation see Smith, *Nationalism: theory, ideology, history*, 86-88. See also De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 'Distinctions and articulations: a discourse theoretical framework for the study of populism and nationalism', 308-310.

<sup>46</sup> Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', 6; Eric Hobsbawm, 'Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914', in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (New York, 1983, 2013), 263-307, here: 263, 264, 286, 307. Also see Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos, 'Nation and nationalism in contemporary Europe. A theoretical perspective', in: Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos (ed.), *Nation & Identity in Contemporary Europe* (London, New York; 1996, 2005, eBook), 7-29, here: 9.

populist party – even though there is discussion on what kind of populism – with its focus on ‘the people’, and its anti-elite stance. Additionally, the party can be described as a subculture, as it built a collective identity based on the values that already existed in the area and the associations the party created. Lega can also be termed an ethnic-regionalist party, because it pursued a policy of self-determination, based on a supposed ethnical difference from the rest of Italy. Finally, Lega aimed to construct – especially during the period of secession – a nation and national identity, complete with a shared history, myths and symbols. These interpretations use various concepts – populism, subculture and ethno-regionalism/-nationalism – to describe Lega and there is without a doubt merit in using these concepts when comparing Lega with other populist, subcultural or ethno-regionalist/-nationalist parties respectively.

What the interpretations however not do, is analyze in detail the construction and extent of this Northern (later Padanian) identity, which it developed and extended religiously to become an all-encompassing entity in the life of the people of the North – it could therefore be argued that Lega Nord aimed to be a *political religion*. Cento Bull and Gilbert refer to Lega’s religious nature, without describing it as a political religion: ‘[t]here is no doubt that, in the late 1990s, Bossi’s movement developed strong points of comparison with fundamentalist Christian movements and with the early totalitarian parties. [...] the Lega Nord took on the characteristics of a sect with a strong ideological message, charismatic leadership and an evangelical congregation.’<sup>47</sup> It is important to develop a sense of Lega’s religious aspects to better understand these modern political movements and the process of identity- and nation-construction as designed by Lega.

A final and essential interpretation on Lega must therefore be included. In *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe: Jean Marie Le Pen’s National Front and Umberto Bossi’s Northern League* political scientist José Pedro Zúquete zooms in on the religious nature of Lega Nord. Zúquete creates an ideal type he designates *missionary politics*. He argues that

Missionary Politics should be understood as a form of *political religion* carried out by a *chosen people* who, in a time of self-perceived deep-rooted *crisis*, sees itself as a *moral community* led by a *missionary charismatic* leader undertaking *collective mission* of *salvation*. Driven by *apocalyptic* and *millenarian* dynamics, the community manifests its solidarity and belief in the mission by constant *ritualization*. In the process, the members of the community celebrate themselves as a *sacred collective*, as representatives of a *sacred nation* and heirs to a *sacred history* involved in an apocalyptic showdown with the evil and *conspiratorial* forces of a *new world order*.<sup>48</sup>

Zúquete states that he attempts ‘to discern how a [political] group is sustained by non-material dimensions: the cultural frames that sustain these groups, that is, the internal production of a narrative and codes that establish a symbolic world and a framework of salvation.’<sup>49</sup> There is a lot of merit to his

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<sup>47</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 63.

<sup>48</sup> José Pedro Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe: Jean Marie Le Pen’s National Front and Umberto Bossi’s Northern League*, (Dissertation; Bath, 2004), 31, 32. Italics in original.

<sup>49</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe: Jean Marie Le Pen’s National Front and Umberto Bossi’s Northern League*, 32.

approach. In his analysis, Zúquete touches upon a large part of the rituals, symbolism, charismatic leadership, group identity and enemies of Lega as a logical and extensive explanatory model for the development of Lega Nord's policies and move towards separatism, in which a holy nation was perceived as an original and authentic entity which was not abstract but '*worshipped* [sic] as the objectification and concrete realization of the collective will of the people.'<sup>50</sup> This thesis contends that there are however some important points of contention with missionary politics.

Zúquete accepts that '[t]here are important materialist explanations for the phenomenon [the appeal of contemporary neo-populist movements] – economic insecurity, views on immigration, issues of crime and order, political corruption' – but Zúquete does not take these developments into account in the rest of his research.<sup>51</sup> Equally, he analyzes 'the immediate following of the leader and not [...] the "general voter."<sup>52</sup> Missionary Politics thereby does not touch upon the general appeal of Lega. In addition, Zúquete does not look at the 'incarnation' of the nation (a northern parliament and a provisional government), leaving the practical matter of nation-state development at the sideline. Neither does he trace the development and dynamic nature of the northern community or Padanian nation through time. The community and nation in Missionary Politics simply exist.

The main problem with Zúquete's work however consists of the essentialist approach that he applies. Although Zúquete notices the 'construction of a group identity', the 'construction of [an] alternative world by the Northern League' and an 'on-going construction of a symbolic reality', throughout his work he takes the sources at face value and he does not question their inherent construction nor does he address the inconsistencies within this seemingly coherent religion.<sup>53</sup> His example of the vanguard (the hard-core of Lega supporters), which Zúquete describes as 'men and women who are conscious of *their history*', speaks volumes to his essentialist approach.<sup>54</sup> This thesis takes a practical position towards the existing interpretations by employing them when applicable, and uses a historical approach that considers the different phases that Callegaro describes and combines them with the various aspects of Zúquete's missionary politics, through a critical contextual analysis – while not using the same terminology.

### *Difficulties of terminology: a sacralization of politics*

Some difficulties arise in the terminology of political religion. There are a couple of concepts that aim to denote some form of sacralization of politics. Although the concepts of secular, civil and political religion were used since the eighteenth-century and systematic research was conducted since the 1960s, Emilio Gentile's seminal work *Politics of Religion* (2000) has blown the field of study wide open and

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<sup>50</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 184. Italics in original.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, 120, 159, 165.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, 139. Italics by me, SE.

opted to provide some conceptual clarity.<sup>55</sup> He divided what he called ‘politics of religion’ into two main fields: *civil religion* and *political religion*. At the core of the former is the ‘sacralization of a political system that guarantee[s] a plurality of ideas, free competition in the exercise of power and the ability of the governed to dismiss their governments through peaceful and constitutional methods.’<sup>56</sup> *Civil religion* is not obligatory and leaves room for other ideologies. *Political religion* on the other hand ‘is the sacralization of a political system founded on an unchallengeable monopoly of power, ideological monism, and the obligatory and unconditional subordination of the individual and the collectivity to its code of commandments.’<sup>57</sup> Political religion is thus intolerant and fundamentalist, while trying to enter into every aspect of an individual’s life. Gentile establishes that civil religion arose at the end of the eighteenth-century with the onset of modern democracy and mass politics.<sup>58</sup> During the nineteenth-century

[...] states adopted myths, rituals and symbols [...] in order to confer a sacred aura on their political institutions, to exalt the fundamental principles and values of the national community, and to cultivate a collective identity among their citizens, which required them to feel a sense of duty, loyalty, and devotion toward both state and nation.<sup>59</sup>

The term political religion was used by Gentile to describe the totalitarian regimes and the corresponding movements of the twentieth-century.<sup>60</sup>

The greatest and most inhuman massacres, which involved the mass slaughter of millions of victims at the altar of deified political entities, were inflicted during the century by political movements that operated very much as fundamentalist and intolerant religious movements. Such movements claimed to determine the meaning and ultimate purpose of existence by distinguishing between humans who were the followers of Good and those who were the followers of Evil.<sup>61</sup>

Gentile’s work has been highly influential and was simultaneously criticized in the field of the sacralization of politics. Zúquete’s terminology of missionary politics for example is strongly influenced by Gentile. As can be seen from his definition above, Zúquete describes his terminology as a subsection of political religion. The term is however not widely used in historical studies and for good reasons. His emphasis on ‘apocalyptic and millenarian dynamics’, does not do justice to the far wider appeal that political religions in general, and Lega Nord in particular, had on the general voter.

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<sup>55</sup> Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, (Princeton, Oxford; 2000), 1, 2. In the eighteenth-century Jean-Jacques Rousseau used the term civil religion to denote a new citizens’ religion that was essential for democracy and existed in opposition to traditional metaphysical religions. The term ‘secular religion’ was used in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century in opposition to traditional religions. In the twentieth-century Raymond Aron used the concept of ‘secular religion’ for doctrines that promised salvation of humankind. The term of ‘political religion’ was also used since the eighteenth-century. In 1938 Eric Voegelin however used it to describe the political cults created by totalitarian regimes. Since the 1920s Fascism had however already explicitly used the term to define its own (totalitarian) view of politics.

<sup>56</sup> Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, xv.

<sup>57</sup> Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, xv.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, xvi.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, xvi.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, xvii.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, xvii.

In the edited volume *Political Religion beyond totalitarianism*, historian Joost Augusteijn and others assert that Gentile's use of the term *political religion* was too rigid. They therefore argue in favor of – and immediately research – political religion as a useful term to describe an array of modern mass politics, which 'would not function if it did not resemble religion to a certain extent.'<sup>62</sup> Some degree of sacralization is therefore a necessity.<sup>63</sup> This sacralization of modern politics moved between two ideal types, civil and political religion – congruent to the use of the terms by Gentile, with the latter being more exclusive, fundamentalist and intolerant than the former – and the masses had an important role in this sacralization.<sup>64</sup> They had to be mobilized for a sacred cause and 'their hearts and minds were only completely won through participation in political rituals, liturgy, celebration of a shared past and veneration of charismatic leaders.'<sup>65</sup>

Overall, the aim is not to give a definition of political religion, but to research how Lega Nord and the nation it created aimed to involve itself in all aspects of its followers' lives, and present them with a sense of community and purpose. The story Lega told (history), the symbols, myths and liturgy it used played an essential part in the development of this political religion. It is this story, these symbols and the liturgy that form the core of this thesis. Different from the examples in *Political Religion beyond totalitarianism*, between 1989 and 2001 Lega Nord – or so I argue – failed to create either a congruent or accepted sacralization of its nation, Padania. Lega's *top-down* approach to the matter and the absence of an agreed-upon collective Padanian identity (or identities) – reflected in the diminishing votes in the 1999 elections – led to the near abandonment of this sacralization.

### *Sources, approach and structure*

The thesis is based on two primary sources, in order to analyze and define the actions of Lega Nord. The first primary source is the chronicle created by Lega, the *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi*. It consists of several different parts, of which part II to VI were used (1988-2001). The focus is on 1989 – 2001, which the chronicle discusses in approximately 160 pages. The source contains both a day-to-day description of those issues the chronicler or chroniclers deemed important and speeches given by Umberto Bossi or other important members of Lega Lombarda and Lega Nord. The chronicler is most likely a party official(s) or employee(s). Cento Bull and Gilbert suggest that Bossi was the party's chronicler and the *Cronistoria* itself refers to the *Segreteria Organizzativa Federale* or Federal Organizing Secretariat of which Bossi was the head.<sup>66</sup> This source presents a top-down idealized image of the party and its actions, and can be used to discern the framing of events and developments by Lega. Within this thesis, the *Cronistoria* functions as a chronological overview for the developments of and within the party, especially in those areas where the existing academic literature by political scientists

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<sup>62</sup> Augusteijn, Dassen and Janse, 'Concluding Remarks', 259.

<sup>63</sup> Augusteijn, Dassen and Janse, 'Concluding Remarks', 259, 260.

<sup>64</sup> Joost Augusteijn, 'Nationalism as a political religion', in: Joost Augusteijn, Patrick Dassen and Maartje Janse (ed.), *Political Religion beyond totalitarianism: the sacralization of politics in the age of democracy*, (Chippenham, 2013), 137-160, here: 144, 145.

<sup>65</sup> Augusteijn, Dassen and Janse, 'Concluding Remarks', 259.

<sup>66</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 21.



and other scholars that study Lega draw blanks or which scholars consider unimportant, but which in fact give tremendous insight into the activities of the party. By using the Cronistoria this thesis is able to add a time-oriented component to the existing academic literature. In addition, the events and speeches within the Cronistoria are viewed as a source that functions to describe Lega's liturgical events and their content. The source was found as a pdf-file on Lega's website and has since then (June 2019) been removed, but can still be found with the hyperlinks in the footnotes. There is a weakness in this source, since it is unclear if and when it was most recently updated. Its removal from the party's website suggests that it is a past with which the modern Lega no longer wants to associate itself.

The second primary source is the *Quaderni Padani*, a pseudo-scientific bi-monthly magazine, founded in 1995 by architect, essayist and writer Gilberto Oneto. Oneto was called the ideologist of the party and he became the first minister of identity within the provisional Padanian government in 1996. Furthermore, Oneto frequently wrote editorials under the pseudonym 'Brenno', which supposedly was also the name of a Celtic leader who lived around 400 BC.<sup>67</sup> *Quaderni Padani* was published by *La Libera Compagnia Padana*, which was chaired by Oneto and – as written in its first edition – 'aims at the autonomy and unity of Padania, the study of its history and its territory, its socio-economic characteristics, the promotion of its local cultural events, its languages and customs.'<sup>68</sup> From 1995 onwards, the magazine played a major role in giving Lega's political and economic views a stronger background and presented more refined and elaborate arguments to Lega's standpoints.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, it is one of the few if not the only source developed by Lega's cultural nationalists to delve extensively into the Padanian nation by presenting and developing various enemies, heroes, forefathers, symbols, myths and values. As argued above, these are important aspects in the examination of a political religion.

*Quaderni Padani* contains an array of articles on a range of different subjects: from history, identity, politics, and economics, to architecture, religion, and even astrology. The heterogeneity of the articles suggests that the audience was varied. Additionally, I categorized the magazine as pseudoscientific because of the last subject, the inconsequential application of footnotes and bibliographies, the use of made-up words, and the very unscientific method in which it discussed some of the subjects. Congruently, political scientists like Daniele Albertazzi have disproven the claims made in some of the articles.<sup>70</sup>

The magazine developed since its first edition. The first issue was no thicker than 30 pages in A4-format with five articles, written by four authors, and Oneto wrote two of them. The last issue consulted, 32, had 72 pages in A4-format with ten articles and additional 'historical' documents,

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<sup>67</sup> E-mail correspondence Silke Eyt with *Quaderni Padani*, 'Ricerca *Quaderni Padani*', (24 December 2020).

<sup>68</sup> No author, 'Un' associazione per la Padania', *Quaderni Padani* (1995), 1:1, 1-2, here: 2. The magazine can to this day be found on the website of *l'Associazione Gilberto Oneto*, the successor of *La Libera Compagnia Padana*. See <https://archivio.associazionegilberto.neto.org>.

<sup>69</sup> No author, 'Un' associazione per la Padania', 2.

<sup>70</sup> Daniele Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation? The uses of the past in the Lega Nord's positing of Padania', *National Identities* (2006), 8:1, 21-39.

interviews and notes. In between, there were several special editions, on specific subjects: a ‘romanticized’ history of the Gauls (19), the struggle against Islam (22/23), and the Padanian constitution (25/26). For this thesis, a total of 32 issues were researched, spanning 6 years and more than 1800 pages in total.

I corresponded with Marco Peruzzi, a member of La Libera Compagnia Padana throughout its entire existence and founder and member of the board of directors of *l’Associazione Gilberto Oneto* – the successor of La Libera Compagnia Padana and trustee of the Quaderni Padani.<sup>71</sup> He argues that the audience mainly consisted of ‘highly educated people’ all of them ‘interested in the independence of Padania’.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, Peruzzi states that 1500 copies were distributed via e-mail, a third to libraries and other organizations, and the rest to members of the magazine.<sup>73</sup> Being published during the 1990s, it seems likely that hard-copies were sent to libraries and other organizations. Nevertheless, Peruzzi does not delve into exact distribution tactics, nor can this be found anywhere else.

It is important to gain some insight into the workings of Quaderni Padani. Peruzzi states that the authors came from a variety of backgrounds, and were sympathetic to the Padanian cause. According to Peruzzi, they mostly wrote on request, the board of directors decided which articles were published – although sometimes Oneto decided this himself – and the articles were not heavily scrutinized by the editors – which suggests that there was ample room for the individual authors to state their view.<sup>74</sup> Peruzzi states that the magazine was financially independent and with no role for Lega, although it supposedly functioned as a ‘political reference’ in the middle of the 1990s.<sup>75</sup>

Peruzzi’s last statement does however not seem to correlate with my analyses of the magazine. In fact, there are clear arguments to the contrary. First of all, Oneto’s position in the provisional government of Padania and his position as editor-in-chief of Quaderni Padani, suggests a strong level of collaboration. With Oneto as editor-in-chief, it is likely that he not only had influence over which articles were published but also had some influence – if not considerable – over who became part of the editorial board. Secondly, of the 39 authors used in this thesis – of which one was anonymous – 4 were editors of Quaderni Padani and 13 others were active members of Lega (including 3 members who were also editors of the magazine).<sup>76</sup> In the case of the former, the academic literature describes the work by the various editors almost exclusively as party literature or as a self-evident part of Lega.<sup>77</sup> In the case of 9 authors, no active connection with Lega was found – although in the case of 3 of them their work

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<sup>71</sup> The association was founded in 2016, aims to preserve the work by Oneto (with the explicit permission of his widow) and ‘promote the culture, languages, traditions and autonomist and independence aspirations of Padania’. Gianluca Marchi, ‘Chi Siamo’, <<https://www.associazionegilbertooneo.org/ChiSiamo.aspx>> [accessed 10 December 2020]. See also No author, ‘Home’, *Associazione Gilberto Oneto* <<https://archivio.associazionegilbertooneo.org/>> [accessed 10 December 2020].

<sup>72</sup> E-mail correspondence Eyt with Quaderni Padani, ‘Ricerca Quaderni Padani’, (24 December 2020).

<sup>73</sup> E-mail correspondence Eyt with Quaderni Padani, ‘Ricerca Quaderni Padani’, (24 December 2020).

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>76</sup> References to the active members of Lega and editors of Quaderni Padani are presented in the footnotes.

<sup>77</sup> See Albertazzi and McDonnell, ‘Separati in Casa? The Lega Nord in government’, 13; Albertazzi, “‘Back to our roots’ or self-confessed manipulation? The uses of the past in the Lega Nord’s positing of Padania’, 26, 34.

was considered party literature.<sup>78</sup> 13 authors were not found, but in the academic literature 2 were described as *leghisti* (members of Lega) and one author's work was referred to as party literature.<sup>79</sup> When only the name of the author is known, but nothing else, he/she is referred to as 'unknown'. The majority of articles (58 out of 74) were written by members of Lega or active sympathizers, including authors whose work within the academic literature is referred to as party literature but are not otherwise found.

The numbers above give credibility to the argument that *Quaderni Padani* was closely interwoven with Lega and functioned to a large extent as the ideological mouthpiece of the party. More than that I would argue that the magazine added flavor to Lega's political arguments and brought depth to the subject of Padania. From 1995 to at least 1999, rather than functioning as a 'political reference' as Peruzzi argued, *Quaderni Padani* toed the party line on important political issues, such as the negative view on Italy as a nation-state, the harmful impact of globalization, the ambivalent perception of the EU, the changing relationship with the church, and Padania's position within Italy and Europe. The attention of *Quaderni Padani* authors was on telling a range of stories and presenting arguments that fitted within Lega's political discourse. The authors gave that discourse a stronger background and presented more refined and elaborate arguments to Lega's standpoints. In addition, several scholars like political scientists Michele Huyseune, Daniele Albertazzi, Duncan McDonnell, Isabelle Fremeaux, and Margarita Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro explicitly stated that *Quaderni Padani* was party literature or used it as a given fact. Huyseune even argues that it 'originated as a party-sponsored project of construction of Padanian identity that was intended to give the Lega's claim to the independence of Padania a solid intellectual backing' and he explicitly considered it 'as part of the nation-building program of the Lega Nord.'<sup>80</sup>

Within the articles of *Quaderni Padani*, arguments to support the intricate connection between the party and the magazine can also be found. A late 1999 *Quaderni Padani* article by active Lega member and editor of *Quaderni Padani* Flavio Grisolia argued that Lega Nord was the only party that could represent Padania, because in the party 'alone the authentic spirit of the Padanian peoples and their civilization survive'.<sup>81</sup> Equally, in a late 2000 issue, Oneto asserted that there was a need for

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<sup>78</sup> Isabelle Fremeaux and Daniele Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community" in Political propaganda. The Case of Lega Nord', *National Identities* (2002), 4:2, 145-160, here: 152, 159; Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?' 26; Michel Huyseune, 'Landscapes as a symbol of nationhood: The Alps in the rhetoric of the Lega Nord', *Nations and Nationalism* (2010), 16:2, 354-373, here: 360.

<sup>79</sup> Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?' 26, 33, 34.

<sup>80</sup> Huyseune, 'Landscapes as a symbol of nationhood: The Alps in the rhetoric of the Lega Nord', 357, 371. Also see Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?' 24-26, 32-34; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 'Separati in Casa?', 13; Fremeaux and Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community" in Political propaganda. The Case of Lega Nord', 154; Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 98, 99.

<sup>81</sup> Flavio Grisolia, 'Proposte per uno statuto etnonazionalista padano', *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:25/26, 38-45, here: 39. For Grisolia's position as editor of *Quaderni Padani* see for example the colophon of the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of *Quaderni Padani*. No author, 'Redazione', *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:17, 2. For his position as active member of Lega see Michael Braun, 'Koalition gegen die Moderne', *Taz*, <<https://taz.de/Koalition-gegen-die-Moderne/!1200065/>> [accessed 14 June 2022].

coherence and cohesion in the urge for freedom and this could only be satisfied through Lega. For Padanians to have any political value and to protect local identities, there was no space outside Lega.<sup>82</sup>

The relationship between the party and the magazine did however change. Huysseune contends that from late 1999/early 2000 onwards, as Lega focused on devolution and alliances, the relationship between the party leadership and cultural nationalists (*Quaderni Padani*) became more complex and Peruzzi argued that Lega no longer functioned as a ‘political reference’.<sup>83</sup> A late 2000 *Quaderni Padani* article on Piedmontese autonomy in fact reveals the cracks between the Padanian political and cultural leadership. According to the unknown author Martino Mestolo, Lega’s 1996 provisional government and the party itself showed a certain level of insensitivity towards identity and lost its connection with and ability to speak to the people. Where Lega failed, the cultural Padanian associations had an important role in preserving and growing the autonomist ideals of the unitary project.<sup>84</sup> In conclusion, Peruzzi’s view that Lega functioned as a ‘political reference’ in the 1990s therefore seems to suggest a post-conflict rectification of the Lega-*Quaderni Padani* relationship, which both the sources and academic literature above do not support.

Overall, the *Cronistoria* and *Quaderni Padani* have not been thoroughly researched before, but require such examination because of the rich insight they give into the alternative world Lega and its cultural nationalists wanted to create. From first-hand sources it remains inconclusive whether Lega’s nation-making project was successful. In order to further research this question, this thesis will turn to secondary research on this subject. The academic literature not only presents interpretations on developments, but also describes Lega’s events and often quote Bossi or various active members who contributed to Lega’s discourse. This thesis will interpret this information through the scope of political religion. The many Italian quotations are translated by myself.

This thesis employs a critical contextual and linguistic analysis of the sources. It takes from the theory of critical realism, which means an analysis of the language used in the sources which intended to construct a political discourse – a particular structure of meaning – to generate and strengthen an identity and nation.<sup>85</sup> Political scientists Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis argue that ‘discourses offer citizens particular subject positions to identify with and [...] this process of being interpellated by discourses constructs individuals as subjects’, meaning, ‘interpellation/identification produces a sense of collective identity’, and an in-group in opposition to an out-group.<sup>86</sup> A critical contextual and linguistic analysis is therefore logical to research how Lega Nord and the nation it created aimed to involve itself in all aspects of its followers’ lives, and present them with a sense of community and purpose. In practice, this means that this thesis delves into the language Lega and its subsidiaries – the *Cronistoria* and *Quaderni Padania* – used to create a history, symbols, myths and

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<sup>82</sup> Gilberto Oneto, ‘L’autonomismo piemontese oggi’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:32, 56-61, here: 58, 60, 61.

<sup>83</sup> Huysseune, ‘Landscapes as a symbol of nationhood’, 357; E-mail correspondence Eyt with *Quaderni Padani*, (24 December 2020).

<sup>84</sup> Martino Mestolo, ‘I più recenti sviluppi dell’autonomismo piemontese’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:32, 30-38, here: 37, 38.

<sup>85</sup> Marc Boone, *Historici en hun métier: een inleiding tot de historische kritiek*, (Gent; 2005, 2011), 241-245; De Cleen and Stavrakakis, ‘Distinctions and articulations’, 306.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, 307.

liturgy. This has the aim to see to what extent the party turned itself and its creation of the Padanian nation into a political religion between 1989 and 2001.

The first chapter focuses on the 1989-1995 period and delves into the foundation of Lega Lombarda, later Lega Nord, and its main policies in the 1980s and early 1990s. It subsequently delves thematically into the ethnicity, enemies, history, myths, values and liturgy that Lega constructed during that period. A caesura exists at the end of 1994/beginning of 1995, when Lega moved from federalism to secessionism and congruently put far more emphasis on the Padanian nation and identity, by pronouncing the birth of the Padanian state, establishing institutions and ‘rediscovering’ ancestors.<sup>87</sup> The second chapter therefore maintains the same structure, but examines the 1995-2001 period and Quaderni Padani (established in 1995) is given a prominent role. Throughout the chapters, the sacralization of politics, varying from civil to political religion is central and within certain arguments is discussed at length. The caesura signifies the move from civil to political religion, even if Lega ultimately failed for the large majority of its voters to present a convincing discourse and its electoral results dwindled.

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<sup>87</sup> Albertazzi, “‘Back to our roots’ or self-confessed manipulation?’, 23, 24.

## Chapter 1: 1989-1995

### *Clientelism, corruption and the rise of Lega*

Lega Lombarda came into existence at a time when the power of the parties that had ruled the post-war period – mostly the Christian Democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana* or DC), who ruled with socialists, republicans, and liberals – lost in importance. For over 40 years, the DC stood at the center of a state-directed clientelist system, permeating every institution and reaching profoundly into society. When grand-scale corruption was discovered during the *mani pulite* (clean hands) investigations (1992) – leading to the *Tangentopoli* (kickback city) scandals – the parties fell from power and the First Republic transitioned to the Second Republic.<sup>88</sup> It was in this political climate and the ruling parties' incapability to address issues of importance to the modernizing and industrializing north, that Lega Lombarda came into existence.<sup>89</sup> Woods, Fremeaux and Albertazzi, and Cento Bull and Gilbert contend that the party presented a solution for the shared interests of northern Italians, who saw their society and traditions crumble under the pressure of a swiftly changing economy, intervention by the state and immigration.<sup>90</sup> Ruzza and Fella, as well as political scientists Joseph Farrell, Carl Levy, Percy Allum and Ilvo Diamanti show that different from the political parties in power, Lega Lombarda's members went out to clubs, bars and halls of Lombardian towns and cities to talk face-to-face in clear, sexist, informal and understandable (local) language.<sup>91</sup>

According to Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, and sociologists Roberto Biorcio and Tommaso Vitale, Lega Lombarda made Lombardy the center of protest in northern Italy and placed it in opposition to Rome. Additionally, and as Cento Bull and Gilbert, and Biorcio and Vitale argue, Lega invented the Northern Question, offering a dichotomy between a laboriousness and efficient north against an inefficient center and south.<sup>92</sup> More than that, according to Woods and Huysseune, Lega argued that the

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<sup>88</sup> The political culture that emerged from 1860 onwards was based upon the premise of *quid pro quo*. Members of parliament worked to retain their position, reinforcing a system of clientelism and corruption. Under Mussolini, this system extended in scope. See: Brierley and Giacometti, 'Italian national identity', 162-164; Nick Carter, 'Rethinking the Italian Liberal State', *Bulletin of Italian Politics* (2011), 3:2, 225-245, here: 229; Christopher Duggan, 'Politics in the era of Depretis and Crispi, 1870-96', in: J. Davis (ed.), *Italy in the nineteenth century* (Oxford, 2000), 154-180, here: 163, 164; Corduwener and Weststeijn, *Proeftuin Italië: Hoe het mooiste land van Europa de moderne politiek uitvond*, 51, 52, 83, 120, 144, 160, 166, 201, 204, 208-221; Jean-Louis Briquet, 'Clientelism', in: Andrea Mammone, Ercole Giap Parini and Giuseppe A. Veltri (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Italy: History, politics, society* (2015), 252-261, here: 252, 253; David Hine, 'Federalism, Regionalism and the Unitary State: Contemporary Regional Pressures in Historical Perspective', in: Carl Levy (ed.), *Italian Regionalism: History, Identity and Politics* (Oxford, Washington D.C., 1996), 109-129, here: 118; Woods, 'The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration', 189-192, 194; Woods, 'The Centre No Longer Holds: The Rise of Regional Leagues in Italian Politics', 57, 62-64, 66-68; Fabrizio Eva, 'Deconstructing Italy: (Northern) Italians and their new perceptions of territoriality', *Geojournal* (1999), 48, 101-107, here: 103; Roberto Biorcio and Tommaso Vitale, 'Culture, Values and Social Basis of Northern Italian Centrifugal regionalism. A Contextual Political Analysis of the Lega Nord', in: Michel Huysseune (ed.), *Contemporary Centrifugal Regionalism: Comparing Flanders and Northern Italy*, (Brussels, 2011), 171-199, here: 171, 173; Jakob Schwörer, 'Right-wing populist parties as defender of Christianity? The case of the Italian Northern League', *Zeitschrift für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik* (2018), 2, 387-413, here: 390, 393, 394; Brierley and Giacometti, 'Italian national identity', 165, 166, 170; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 18, 21, 52; Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 16-20, 23, 24.

<sup>89</sup> Hine, 'Federalism, Regionalism and the Unitary State: Contemporary Regional Pressures in Historical Perspective', 112, 113; Farrell and Levy, 'The Northern League', 135; Passarelli, 'Extreme right parties in Western Europe', 56.

<sup>90</sup> Woods, 'The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration', 197; Fremeaux and Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community"', 153; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 74; Farrell and Levy, 'The Northern League', 142, 143; Allum and Diamanti, 'The Autonomous Leagues in the Veneto', 155. Also see Albertazzi and McDonnell, 'Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre', 7.

<sup>92</sup> The issue of the 'Northern Question' is not well defined in academic literature, but largely suggests that the Italian state and economy as they were in the early 1990s, was no longer sufficient for the functioning of the north. Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 94; Biorcio and Vitale, 'Culture, Values and Social Basis of Northern Italian Centrifugal regionalism. A Contextual

overly centralized, clientelistic, corrupt and southernized Italian state, as well as the national parties, blocked northern development and heavily taxed the colonized north.<sup>93</sup> Woods, Cento Bull and Gilbert, and Farrell and Levy show that against this background the party presented a pro-business and privatization program to Lombardy's small-business electorate.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, Cento Bull and Gilbert describe that Lega Lombarda's first manifest called for the protection of Lombardy's people and culture.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, Farrell and Levy, and Cento Bull and Gilbert contend by the early 1990s Lega's focus shifted to privatization, tax cuts and immigration control.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, as Callegaro and Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro reason, Lega argued in favor of some form of self-government – first regionalism, later federalism and by 1995 this turned to separatism.<sup>97</sup>

Not long after the formation of Lega Nord, the party presented a federalist state (initially consisting of three regions, by 1995 replaced by a north-south dichotomy) as the solution for most, if not all, of the North's problems.<sup>98</sup> The Cronistoria describes how during a meeting at Pontida on 16 June 1991, Bossi stated that the Italian nation-state was both too large (as a public financial management unit) and too small (because of the size of the internal market). A federal state was the perfect answer to this problem. During the same meeting, Bossi initiated the formation of a federalist state by symbolically proclaiming *la Repubblica del Nord* (the Republic of the North). According to Cento Bull and Gilbert, although highly symbolic, for the activists this moment marked the start of a political struggle.<sup>99</sup>

After the successful 1992 elections, with over 8% of the vote, Lega Nord almost completely ceased its strong anti-national rhetoric. Brierley and Giacometti show that with the prospect of greater political success, Lega worked together with the central government to reinforce and revitalize it to some extent. However, as Cento Bull and Gilbert, and political scientist Benito Giordano make clear, Lega's success was blocked significantly by alleged involvement in the Tangentopoli scandals and the appearance of Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* on the political stage in early 1994, which took the spotlight away from Bossi.<sup>100</sup>

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Political Analysis of the Lega Nord', 174, 175; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 7. See also Woods, 'The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration', 197.

<sup>93</sup> Woods, 'The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration', 197, 198; Michel Huyseune, 'Imagined Geographies: Political and Scientific Discourses on Italy's North-South Divide', in: Bruno Coppieters and Michel Huyseune (ed.), *Secession, History and the Social Sciences*, (Brussels, 2002), 207-226, here: 209, 210.

<sup>94</sup> Lega presented this pro-small business program at a time when DC mainly favored large state-enterprises and government intervention. Woods, 'The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration', 198; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 4; Farrell and Levy, 'The Northern League', 140.

<sup>95</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 4, 9, 10.

<sup>96</sup> Farrell and Levy, 'The Northern League', 132, 140; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 43. Also see Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 91, 92.

<sup>97</sup> Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 37, 38; Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 94. Also see Biorcio and Vitale, 'Culture, Values and Social Basis', 174.

<sup>98</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 22-26; Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 96.

<sup>99</sup> There is some issue on the precise date: Cento Bull and Gilbert argue that it was 16 May, while Lega's chronicle states that it was 16 June. Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 26; No author, '16 giugno 1991 - a Pontida nasce "la potentissima" Repubblica del Nord', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 10.

<sup>100</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 30-32; Giordano, 'Italian regionalism or "Padanian" nationalism', 455, 456.

For the 1994 elections, Berlusconi created two alliances with on the one hand the MSI-AN (*Movimento Sociale Italiano – Alleanza Nazionale*, a neo-fascist party mainly based in southern Italy) in the *Polo del Buongoverno* (Good Government Pole) and on the other hand Lega in the *Polo della Libertà* (Liberty Pole).<sup>101</sup> During the elections, Lega got 116 out of 630 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 105 out of 315 in the Senate.<sup>102</sup> Forza Italia won and the governing coalition formed by Berlusconi in 1994 consisting of Forza Italia, Lega Nord and MSI-AN, lasted only eight months. According to a combination of academic literature by Ruzza and Fella, Brierley and Giacometti, and historians Pepijn Corduwener and Arthur Weststeijn, Bossi pulled the plug in December 1994 due to a combination of difficulties he faced: reconciling his protest movement with the task of government, the corruption investigations launched against Berlusconi and Forza Italia's successful attempt to appropriate part of Lega's middle-class constituency.<sup>103</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, and Farrell and Levy add that Bossi lost control of Lega as plenty of its representatives, elected through the alliance with Forza Italia, no longer needed him for advancement and defected. Lega's ranks heavily thinned out as a schism occurred in which 50 of Lega's 177 members in both houses realigned with Berlusconi or became independent. Cento Bull and Gilbert show in addition that the pact with Forza Italia was not accepted by Lega's most radical supporters. Rather, there was an increasingly strong current within Lega for ending all alliances and gaining more independence from Rome.<sup>104</sup> After the fall of the government, Lega Nord entered into the opposition, unencumbered by MSI-AN or Forza Italia.

### *Italian identity and Northern ethnicity*

The next section delves deeper into the identity Lega aimed to construct from its foundation up to the early 1990s. The Italian governments – ranging from the liberals at the end of the nineteenth-century, to Mussolini who wanted to encourage a sense of *Romanità*, and up to the post-war parties – aimed to nationalize the Italian population, but as a top-down policy this proved challenging and was hindered by the persistence of an excessive attachment to the city or village of birth – or *Campanilismo* (derived from the word *campanile*, which means bell tower). *Campanilismo* was synonymous with the fragmented nature of the Italian peninsula and a lack of commitment to anything larger than the local community.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 32.

<sup>102</sup> Farrell and Levy, 'The Northern League', 135, 136. Also see Brierley and Giacometti, 'Italian national identity', 181.

<sup>103</sup> Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 28; Corduwener and Weststeijn, *Proeftuin Italië*, 231; Brierley and Giacometti, 'Italian national identity', 181, 182.

<sup>104</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 33, 34, 36, 37; Farrell and Levy, 'The Northern League', 147.

<sup>105</sup> Stefano Cavazza among others has pointed to the multi-layered and multiple identities that the inhabitants of Italian cities and regions have had in the nineteenth century – both before and after the unification. Stefano Cavazza, 'Regionalism in Italy: a critique', in: Joost Augusteijn en Eric Storm (ed.), *Region and State in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Nation-Building, regional identities and separatism* (New York, 2012), 69–87; Brierley and Giacometti, 'Italian national identity', 162, 163, 164; Sinan Celiksu, *The making of the Padanian Nation: Corruption, Hegemony, Globalization and Legitimacy* (Dissertation, Columbia University, 2014), 121, 122; Carter, 'Rethinking the Italian Liberal State', 229; Vanda Wilcox, 'Encountering Italy: Military service and National Identity during the First World War', *Bulletin of Italian Politics* (2011), 3:2, 283–302, here: 284, 298, 299; Corduwener and Weststeijn, *Proeftuin Italië*, 66, 67, 72, 87, 96, 99, 101, 111, 120; Huysseune, 'Imagined Geographies: Political and Scientific Discourses on Italy's North-South Divide', 219, 220.



The post-war parties did however develop territorial subcultures. Referring to the Christian and Communist subcultures that were created after the Second World War and tied to the congruent political parties – the DC and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) – Cento Bull and Gilbert argue that at its core, each subculture was based on shared values, a common enemy, and with a focus on the local community.<sup>106</sup> Until the 1980s, these subcultures created a sense of coherence and stability.<sup>107</sup> Woods argues that by the 1970s this changed however as new circumstances (modernization, mobility, mass education and secularization) created a generation that was ‘less inclined to subscribe to traditional sub-cultural attachments.’<sup>108</sup> In addition, Brierley and Giacometti argue that there was a political elite that focused less on ‘mediating between national and local values and identities’.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, Passarelli, Callegaro and Cento Bull and Gilbert show that the subcultures started to disintegrate and this development was furthered by the Tangentopoli scandals.<sup>110</sup>

Cento Bull and Gilbert also contend that by the 1980s, as the DC and its subculture declined in the north, Lega Lombarda assumed many of its subcultural features.<sup>111</sup> On this premise, Cento Bull shows that Lega Lombarda created a collective identity in the Third Italy in which the direct close-knit community, overlapping of business and family ties, kinship and trust were central.<sup>112</sup> A variety of articles by Huyseune, Cento Bull, and Albertazzi and McDonnell argue that this identity was supposedly based on values centered around – but not limited to – the family, a ‘Calvinist’ work-ethic – the *popolo produttore* (the producing people) – entrepreneurship, a spirit of sacrifice, trust, solidarity, attachment to local traditions and a Catholic morality.<sup>113</sup> In the process, Woods contends, class and religious cleavages were replaced with a territorial divide, with a focus on regional identity and autonomy.<sup>114</sup> More than that, Brierley and Giacometti argue that Bossi turned the Third Italy – ‘from being the source of historical and cultural identity’ – into the center of an identity founded on interests.<sup>115</sup>

Nevertheless, Brierley and Giacometti suggest that Lega’s identity project was unable to adhere to the idea of striking a chord with the people – as described by Smith – because ‘the idea of “North”, was still lacking the legitimacy and collective memory that historical nations have’.<sup>116</sup> A higher economic and social homogeneity was needed, along with a higher symbolic content. According to the

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<sup>106</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 52.

<sup>107</sup> Ibidem, 52; Brierley and Giacometti, ‘Italian national identity’, 172; Biorcio and Vitale, ‘Culture, Values and Social Basis’, 173; Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos, ‘Introduction’, in: Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos (ed.), *Nation & Identity in Contemporary Europe* (London, New York; 1996, 2005, eBook), 1-5, here: 3.

<sup>108</sup> Woods, ‘The Centre No Longer Holds’, 67.

<sup>109</sup> Brierley and Giacometti, ‘Italian national identity’, 170.

<sup>110</sup> Passarelli, ‘Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe’, 56, 57; Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 64; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 95.

<sup>111</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 4, 71, 72.

<sup>112</sup> Cento Bull, ‘Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League’, 178; Cento Bull, ‘Collective Identities: From the Politics of Inclusion to the Politics of Ethnicity and Difference’, 45.

<sup>113</sup> Huyseune, ‘Masculinity and secessionism in Italy: an assessment’, 601; Huyseune, ‘Imagined Geographies’, 214; Cento Bull, ‘Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League’, 177, 178; Albertazzi and McDonnell, ‘The Lega Nord in the second Berlusconi government’, 961. See also Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 4, 96, 97.

<sup>114</sup> Woods, ‘The Centre No Longer Holds’, 71.

<sup>115</sup> Brierley and Giacometti, ‘Italian national identity’, 173.

<sup>116</sup> Ibidem, 174. See also Smith, *Nationalism: theory, ideology, history*, 89.

aforementioned authors, the latter was achieved by transforming interests into values and arguing that ‘others’ wanted to destroy them.<sup>117</sup> According to Cento Bull, the values of Lega’s collective identity were then turned into ethnic markers. Giordano and Huysseune show that Lega claimed that this separated the northern Italians historically, culturally and traditionally from the rest of Italy.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, Giordano argues that Lega invented this ethnicity to justify its political claims, meaning ‘the protection of the economic interests of the region.’<sup>119</sup> Throughout the academic literature, it remains unclear when this occurred. It might already have existed by the late 1980s/early 1990s and by 1995/6 it seems to have been a *fait accompli*.<sup>120</sup>

Ethnicity to Lega, although consciously developed over time, was presented *a priori*. Cento Bull argues that it was however a pseudo-ethnicity, rather than a genuine one.<sup>121</sup> Giordano even states that based on the geographical entity, Lega made historical claims in order to construct ‘a kind of “neo-ethnicity”’.<sup>122</sup> He adds that it was a neo-ethnicity precisely because it was ‘made up of citizens who not necessarily have a common history, culture of language but an identity derives from similar socio-economic values and attitudes.’<sup>123</sup> Cento Bull describes this move towards ethnicity as a political act:

Whereas in Italy the old collective identities constructed around ideologies based on class or religion were used as resources to wrest concessions from the state, a state seen as the main repository of power and distributor of material goods, a collective identity constructed around ethnicity can be used for a political project which effectively rejects the legitimacy of the state and fights for gaining autonomy *from* the state as opposed to gaining representation *within* the state.<sup>124</sup>

To claim autonomy for the North, an ethnic identity was thus essential.<sup>125</sup> Cento Bull nevertheless contends that Lega downplayed these ‘ethnic markers’ from 1992 onwards when it aimed for a wider appeal. By constructing Padania, the ethnic markers had to be changed again and during the period of devolution, ethnicity was still present within Lega’s ideology, yet in a less explicit form.<sup>126</sup>

These secondary sources demonstrate that the move towards an ethnized identity was a first step towards sacralizing Lega’s politics, because it intended to involve the party in the life of its followers and create a community distinct from its surroundings, based on the supposed characteristics northern Italians possessed at the time. This sacralization functioned to give legitimacy to its political project and cannot be separated from it. In that sense, the sacralization was a means to an end.

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<sup>117</sup> Brierley and Giacometti, ‘Italian national identity’, 174.

<sup>118</sup> Cento Bull, ‘Collective identities’, 45; Giordano, ‘Italian regionalism or “Padanian” nationalism’, 458, 459; Huysseune, ‘Imagined Geographies’, 214.

<sup>119</sup> Giordano, ‘Italian regionalism or “Padanian” nationalism’, 446; Giordano, ‘A Place Called Padania? The Lega Nord and the Political representation of Northern Italy’, 215.

<sup>120</sup> Cento Bull, ‘Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League’, 174, 183; Giordano, ‘Italian regionalism or “Padanian” nationalism’, 467.

<sup>121</sup> Cento Bull, ‘Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League’, 172.

<sup>122</sup> Giordano, ‘Italian regionalism or “Padanian” nationalism’, 466, 467.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*, 467.

<sup>124</sup> Cento Bull, ‘Collective identities’, 48. Italics in original.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibidem*, 48.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibidem*, 49, 51.

## *Enemies*

*The Padanian identity seems to constitute essentially a polemic role: in opposition to Roman centralism, to the cultural southernisation of the Alpine-Po Valley regions and, above all, to the discriminatory redistribution implemented by the Italian State against the most productive areas of the country.*<sup>127</sup>

The portrayal above by Quaderni Padani author Carlo Lottieri – with whom no active connection with Lega was found but whose work Fremeaux and Albertazzi describe as party propaganda – gives the idea that northern Italians and later Padanians, were colonized, exploited, and constantly threatened by an external other. Woods describes that this was part of Lega's discourse.<sup>128</sup> In itself, otherization was not a strange feature in Italy. Messina has shown that Catholic and communist subcultures were defined in diametrical opposition to each other.<sup>129</sup> However, the next section shows that from 1989 to 1995 Lega created a whole range of enemies.

The formation of identity was however not just a one-way street in which the enemies formed the soul of what the North and its inhabitants were not, an anti-identity uniting northern Italians in their struggle for freedom, but I contend that it is rather the initiation point of a dynamic process from which flowed a multi-layered identity combining an invented history, invented traditions and invented symbols, and as Brierley and Giacometti argue it acted as a recurring source for mobilization.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, according to Woods, '[b]y telling Northerners through language and images what they are not, the league has succeeded, to some degree, in fashioning for the north a populist ideal of who and what they are.'<sup>131</sup> That is why it is important to first discern these enemies.

Since the beginning of Lega Autonoma Lombardia, the central state has been the main enemy. To this testifies Bossi's first article in Lega's periodical, *Lombardia Autonomista*, in 1982. Found in Zúquete's work on missionary politics, in it, Bossi stated that Italy was a failed nation-state crippling the North.<sup>132</sup> The *Cronistoria* described that in 1991 Bossi asserted that Italy was antidemocratic and a republic in name only, because in reality it was a money monarchy (*monarchia di denaro*) of a few economic potentates.<sup>133</sup> It was this state and the ruling parties against which Lega directed its resentment. While the excessive power of the ruling parties was labeled *partitocrazia* or *particracy*, to Bossi the term meant more than that. As Bossi described in *Vento Dal Nord* – which he wrote with journalist Daniele Vimercati and which was quoted by Zúquete – to him it signified 'the inextricable

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<sup>127</sup> Carlo Lottieri, 'Neofederalismo e "piccole patrie": per superare lo Stato moderno', *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:7, 10-15, here: 14.

<sup>128</sup> Fremeaux and Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community"', 152, 159; Dwayne Woods, 'A critical analysis of the Northern League's ideographical profiling', *Journal of Political Ideologies* (2010), 15:2, 189-219, here: 189-191.

<sup>129</sup> Messina, 'Opposition in Italy in the 1990s', 468.

<sup>130</sup> Brierley and Giacometti, 'Italian national identity', 176.

<sup>131</sup> Woods, 'A critical analysis of the Northern League's ideographical profiling', 214.

<sup>132</sup> Umberto Bossi, "'Lombards!'", *Lombardia Autonomista* (March 1982), quoted in Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 111, 112.

<sup>133</sup> No author, '16 giugno 1991 - a Pontida nasce "la potentissima" Repubblica del Nord', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 10; Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 121.

bond between the media, big economic groups, and political parties.’<sup>134</sup> Simultaneously Lega also directed its resentment towards centralism by referring to the Middle Ages. Albertazzi describes that in Lega’s discourse medieval centralism was personified by Frederick Barbarossa, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. He found his anti-thesis in Alberto da Giussano. During the twelfth-century, Barbarossa supposedly tried to erect a central government out of the northern Italian city-states, but was defeated by da Giussano. According to Albertazzi, Lega tried to paint the picture of a despot who tried to rule over the free cities in the northern part of the Italian peninsula.<sup>135</sup> In this context, anthropologist Sinan Celiksu clarifies that the image of exploitation and occupation by Barbarossa functioned as an analogy of the contemporary fight against a centralizing power.<sup>136</sup>

Another early enemy was the south and southerners. Southerners were otherized and racialized and this other – according to Cento Bull – ‘is considered to have privileged and illegitimate access to resources and/or is judged to possess negatively evaluated characteristics.’<sup>137</sup> Giordano describes how before the 1980s, products manufactured in the north were sold in the south, and the area provided cheap labor. He and Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro argue that only in the 1980s – with the decrease of economic development and the end of the *special intervention* in the south – the distinction between north and south become more apparent and protest against the latter increased.<sup>138</sup> Political scientist David Hine, Cento Bull and Huysseune however contend that Lega delved into an already existing deep-rooted sense of difference between north and south, and exploited this to attract support and media attention.<sup>139</sup> Whatever was the case, Giordano, and Fremeaux and Albertazzi show that Lega argued that southern Italians allegedly colonized the North (through positions in public administration, the police force, and the education system), and in the process, southern identity became synonymous with Italian identity. Huysseune adds that within Lega’s discourse the south itself was considered ‘parasitic’ and southerners were differentiated from northerners based on supposed cultural characteristics.<sup>140</sup> Cento Bull agrees and adds that within the party’s discourse they were viewed as being a threat and having a ‘negatively evaluated culture’ and *mafiosità*. This meant that they did not share the same values as the northern population. She shows that Lega argued that Lombardy supposedly had to be saved from this *mafiosità* by cutting ‘off the rotten limbs’.<sup>141</sup> Several scholars argue that this anti-southern prejudice

<sup>134</sup> Umberto Bossi and Daniele Vimercati, *Vento Dal Nord*, (Milan, 1992), 103, quoted in Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 121. See also Woods, ‘The Centre No Longer Holds’, 65; Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 10.

<sup>135</sup> Albertazzi, “‘Back to our roots’ or self-confessed manipulation?”, 27. Quaderni Padani later added Barbarossa’s grandson – Frederick II – to the equation. In several articles, by Oneto and the unknown Quaderni Padani author Michele Ghislieri, the latter was described as a traitor of Europe, and a megalomaniac who displayed all sorts of anti-European attitudes (narcissism, bureaucracy, intolerance, brutality). Gilberto Oneto, ‘Il ruolo della Padania nell’eterna lotta fra l’Europa e l’Islam’, *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:22/23, 16-33, here: 26, 27; Gilberto Oneto, ‘Federico II e il falso Carroccio’, *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:12, 26-31, here: 27; Michele Ghislieri, ‘Islam contro Europa I grandi scontri’, *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:22/23, 34-46, here: 41.

<sup>136</sup> Celiksu, *The making of the Padanian Nation: Corruption, Hegemony, Globalization and Legitimacy*, 127.

<sup>137</sup> Cento Bull, ‘Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League’, 173.

<sup>138</sup> Giordano, ‘Italian regionalism or “Padanian” nationalism’, 468, 469; Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, ‘A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?’, 84.

<sup>139</sup> Hine, ‘Federalism, Regionalism and the Unitary State’, 125; Cento Bull, ‘Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League’, 171, 180; Huysseune, ‘Imagined Geographies’, 207.

<sup>140</sup> Giordano, ‘Italian regionalism or “Padanian” nationalism’, 459; Fremeaux and Albertazzi, ‘Discursive strategies around “Community”’, 153; Huysseune, ‘Imagined Geographies’, 215.

<sup>141</sup> Cento Bull, ‘Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League’, 176. See also *ibidem*, 174, 175.

was downplayed at the beginning of the 1990s when Lega tried to compete on a national scale, which however failed and anti-southern sentiment returned in strength.<sup>142</sup>

While immigrants from the south were considered different, Passarelli contends, that immigrants in general were considered a threat to both identity and jobs.<sup>143</sup> More than that, according to Cento Bull, Lega argued that all ethnic groups had to remain within their own 'natural' environment. Zúquete, Fremeaux and Albertazzi, and Giordano show that during the late 1980s *extracomunitari* or Third World non-white immigrants were added to the list and by the end of the 1990s this turned mainly into anti-Islam sentiment.<sup>144</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert demonstrate that according to Lega's discourse immigrants supposedly sold cheap products, cut the profits of the Italian population, spread drugs and diseases and caused an increase in prostitution. That is why a multicultural society was apparently neither possible nor desirable.<sup>145</sup>

Overall, a second aspect of the sacralization of politics found its expression in the creation of enemies. They were part of Lega's discourse and like the ethnic identity Lega created, had a clear function: to legitimate its political goals. More than that, it showed what northern Italians were not and delegitimated the others. Nevertheless, the descriptions by the various scholars listed above, demonstrate that these enemies – the central state, southerners and immigrants – were mainly antagonizing Lega. From 1995 onwards this would change as these and new enemies would become powerful adversaries, fueling a struggle between good and evil.

### *Unity of the North and ceremony and ritual*

The people of the North stood in diametrical opposition to these enemies. At the symbolic center of the North's unity was the Oath of Pontida (1167). At Pontida, a coalition of cities – the Lombard League – had sworn allegiance to one another and they stood up against the centralist state of Frederick Barbarossa. Leadership was in the hands of Alberto da Giussano, a mythological father figure for the North, who commanded the League's armies in the Battle of Legnano (1176) against Barbarossa. The ancient Lega Lombarda won, and Albertazzi and Zúquete demonstrate how the modern Lega interpreted this moment as a success for the North.<sup>146</sup> Based on Albertazzi's article, it can be argued that the original Lega Lombarda functioned as a myth of origins for the modern Lega, while Da Giussano was its hero – representing the northern people. According to Albertazzi, they were the North's – and later Padania's – mythomoteur, which according to the political scientist is 'a constitutive *political* myth which defines

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<sup>142</sup> Fremeaux and Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community"', 153, 154; Allum and Diamanti, 'The Autonomous Leagues in the Veneto', 162; Cento Bull, 'Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League', 185; Huyseune, 'Imagined Geographies', 215.

<sup>143</sup> Passarelli, 'Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe', 63.

<sup>144</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 121, 122; Fremeaux and Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community"', 153, 154; Giordano, 'The continuing transformation of Italian politics and the contradictory fortunes of the Lega Nord', 222.

<sup>145</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 19, 20, 130, 131. See also Martin Evans, 'Languages of Racism within contemporary Europe', in: Brian Jenkins and Spyros A. Sofos (ed.), *Nation & Identity in Contemporary Europe* (London, New York; 1996, 2005, eBook), 30-49, here: 41-44.

<sup>146</sup> Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?', 27, 28; Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 113.

what the nation is and where it is heading by providing an anchorage in the past.<sup>147</sup> Simultaneously Albertazzi argues that heroes ‘embody the spirit of all Padanians’.<sup>148</sup> In that regard, Da Giussano symbolized the strength and courage that members of the community had to emulate in the present. As one of its earliest – if not *the* earliest – symbol, Da Giussano became visible on the flags of the modern Lega Lombarda and later Lega Nord, and as a symbol had to mobilize Lega’s followers.<sup>149</sup> From 1995 onwards, Lega tried to enrich this mythomoteur.

In the same spirit as Da Giussano, the Battle of Legnano was compared to the modern day and age, to which speaks one example of *Lombardia Autonomista* in 1988, quoted by Zúquete: ““1167: defeating the imperial centralism of Barbarossa opens in Europe the democratic age of the communes in Europe. 1989: defeating the centralism of Rome, opens the democratic age of peoples.””<sup>150</sup> It is a historical comparison through time (1167 and 1989), of the enemies (Barbarossa and Rome) and what both the old and the new Lega stood for (freedom, autonomy and democracy). The analogy to Lega’s contemporary political and autonomic struggle is rather clear. Like Da Giussano, Bossi fought for the sake of freedom.<sup>151</sup> According to Fremeaux and Albertazzi, this kind of historical reference was not something new to nationalist movements: ‘nationalists have always resorted to memories, traditions, images that could provide the masses with means of identification so that various “shared” meanings could be attached to their boundary-expressing symbol— *their* community.’<sup>152</sup> In the process – as Albertazzi hints at – the community itself was mythicized. He makes clear that in reality, at the time of the first Lega there was no identity-defining notion of fighting for Lombardy, let alone the North or Padania.<sup>153</sup> In fact, Woods, Hine, Eva and historian Marco Soresina argue that there was an absence of any deep-rooted regional identification among populations of most regions, even during the latter part of the twentieth-century.<sup>154</sup> Even so, besides Da Giussano, within Lega’s discourse, Pontida itself was another important symbol of this freedom, of fighting against oppression.

Before the arrival of Lega on the political stage, Pontida already had an important place in the minds of northern Italians. Since the 1930s, the Battle of Legnano was commemorated at Pontida and it was a folkloristic event organized by the local community.<sup>155</sup> It was only ever since 1990 that Lega claimed Pontida. As Zúquete and Cento Bull and Gilbert show, in 1990 the party ‘revived’ the Oath of

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<sup>147</sup> Albertazzi, ““Back to our roots” or self-confessed manipulation?”, 30. Italics in original.

<sup>148</sup> Ibidem, 31. Italics in original.

<sup>149</sup> Ibidem, 29-31.

<sup>150</sup> *Lombardia Autonomista*, (July 1988), quoted in Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 114.

<sup>151</sup> For more background see Giordano, ‘A place called Padania?’, 219; Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 113, 114; Corduwener and Weststeijn, *Proeftuin Italië*, 207, 208; Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 75.

<sup>152</sup> Fremeaux and Albertazzi, ‘Discursive strategies around “Community”’, 151. Italics in original.

<sup>153</sup> Albertazzi, ““Back to our roots” or self-confessed manipulation?”, 23, 28.

<sup>154</sup> During the 1970s the Italian state tried to link the boundaries of the regions (established for bureaucratic, rather than historic, cultural, ethnic or linguistic reasons) to historical entities, but those had not existed at all and it was therefore difficult to instil a sense of loyalty towards the region. Woods mentions a 1980s survey showing that Italians in Lombardy have no particularly strong attachment to the region. Woods, ‘The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration’, 195, 196; Woods, ‘The Centre No Longer Holds’, 72, 73; Hine, ‘Federalism, Regionalism and the Unitary State’, 111, 112; Eva, ‘Deconstructing Italy: (Northern) Italians and their new perceptions of territoriality’, 102; Marco Soresina, ‘Images of Lombardy in historiography’, *Modern Italy* (2011), 16:01, 67-85, here: 67, 68, 70.

<sup>155</sup> No author, ‘Il Palio tra Folklore e Storia’, *Palio di Legnano* <<https://www.paliodilegnano.it/il-palio-tra-folklore-e-storia/>> [accessed 15 November 2021].

Pontida, which meant that members of Lega Lombarda, recently elected to local Italian councils, swore loyalty to the party.<sup>156</sup> It meant more than that. In a 1991 speech at Pontida which was quoted in the *Cronistoria*, Bossi stated that at Pontida the forefathers showed their will and declared an oath for freedom. In that sense, as Zúquete argues, the modern oath was parallel to the oath taken by the Lombard League of Da Giussano. More than that, as Zúquete implies, through the oath Lega's officials swore their allegiance to and faith in the sacred mission which was the freedom of the North. Additionally, they showed their commitment, dedication and willingness to the party and Bossi.<sup>157</sup> As the *Cronistoria* illustrated, during the first 'commemoration' in 1990, the oath clarified what the importance of that moment and of that place was, both historically and for the future: 'Today at Pontida, the years of our commitment to the freedom of our peoples are joined to the sacrifices of the ancestors who chose this place to swear their commitment in defense of freedom.'<sup>158</sup> The oath quoted in the *Cronistoria* continued that Lega Lombarda's candidates swore their loyalty 'to the cause of the autonomy and the freedom of our peoples, which today, as for 1000 years, are embodied in the Lombard League'.<sup>159</sup> A comparison must be drawn here with historian George Mosse's description of German identity. In *The Nationalization of the Masses. Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* he describes in detail how in Germany during the nineteenth-century appeals were made to a Germanic past and historic memories which were supposedly embedded in the soul of the people. It can be argued that Lega's oath aimed at something similar: to generate a direct link between a mythical past and a present in which the contemporary Lega represented an ancient order and as a symbol functioned to show the perceived continuity of the North over the ages.<sup>160</sup>

The oath was part of Lega's liturgy – meaning, as historian Henk te Velde describes – 'the top-down rules of the "play" of the formal religious service' and, as Mosse designates, constants in an ever-changing world.<sup>161</sup> Beyond the oath and surrounded by symbols and flags, Bossi gave speeches at Pontida in which he revealed the path forward. His opinions, according to Zúquete, were turned into dogmas and the speeches were an integral part of the proceedings, a ritual and thereby part of Pontida's liturgy. More than that, as Mosse argues with regards to Hitler's speeches during Nazi liturgical events and as can be distilled from Zúquete, Bossi's speeches became expressions of the shared faith in the

<sup>156</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 159; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 21. One can see a link with much earlier expressions of oath takings under the nationalist banner, ever since the 1817 festival at Wartburg where participants expressed a testimony of faith, i.e. joined hands and took an oath never to forsake their Bund. See George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses. Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich*, (New York, 1975), 79.

<sup>157</sup> See the first page of the introduction for the full quote. Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 159-161; No author, '16 giugno 1991 - a Pontida nasce "la potentissima" Repubblica del Nord', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 10.

<sup>158</sup> No author, '20 maggio 1990: Giuramento a Pontida', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 8, 9. See also Movimento Giovani Padani, '20 maggio 1990: il Rinnovo del Giuramento di Pontida del 7 aprile 1167',

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20100706055802/http://www.giovanipadani.leganord.org/articoli.asp?ID=5807>> [accessed 06 May 2019].

<sup>159</sup> No author, '20 maggio 1990: Giuramento a Pontida', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 9. See also Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 21, 22.

<sup>160</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses. Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich*, 7, 82.

<sup>161</sup> Henk te Velde, 'The Religious side of Democracy: Early Socialism, Twenty-first century Populism and the Sacralization of Politics', in: Joost Augusteijn, Patrick Dassen, Maartje Jansen, *Political Religion beyond totalitarianism: the sacralization of politics in the age of democracy* (Chippenham, 2013), 33-54, here: 44; Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 16.

mission.<sup>162</sup> Additionally, Albertazzi suggests that Lega's supporters believed that rituals were important tools to take control of their future.<sup>163</sup> Within this context, a reference must be made to psychologists Ralph W. Hood, Peter C. Hill and Bernard Spilka who argue that 'religious ritual and prayer are mechanisms for enhancing a sense of self-control and control of one's world' and faith itself can provide people with 'the feeling that they are doing something that may work.'<sup>164</sup> It could therefore be suggested that Lega's supporters thought that by attending the events at Pontida and listening to Bossi's speeches, they were contributing to the realization of the party's political goals.

Pontida itself became a place of worship, a consecrated place (in Bossi's own words and quoted in the *Cronistoria*), a 'political pilgrimage' for the hard-core supporters (as Giordano summed it up), and a symbol for the sacred mission (as Zúquete contended).<sup>165</sup> The festivities took place on a grassland (*Il prato di Pontida*) that, in time, was bought by Lega and during these festivities this space turned into a sacred space, meaning, in the words of Mosse – 'a space which could be filled only with symbolic activity', 'clearly defined and distinct from its surroundings.'<sup>166</sup> Ruzza and Fella add that the meetings at Pontida – besides having great symbolic value – were an important social occasion for its followers.<sup>167</sup> Giordano, and Ruzza and Fella state that from all over northern Italy, people came together to celebrate the historical battle, exchange ideas and socialize.<sup>168</sup> Additionally, Ruzza and Fella write that during these meetings '[f]lags, anthems and a vast array of Lega Nord souvenirs and merchandise ranging from posters to watches, Padanian "currency" and neckties are marketed.'<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, Albertazzi and McDonnell clarify that the Pontida meetings remained successful and important, as even after the period of secession more than 40.000 people attended the gatherings (2009).<sup>170</sup>

Overall, during the 1989-1995 period, Lega tried to give itself and the North a historical background by establishing forefathers, the Lombard League. Through the forefathers and by showing what they fought for, Lega aimed to legitimize its existence through time to its followers and the outside world. Additionally, Pontida had an important role in the legitimization of Lega's discourse of the North as an entity. The Oath of Pontida and Pontida itself were powerful tools in the sacralization of politics and demonstrate that Lega wanted to involve itself in the lives of its followers. It also establishes how Lega wanted its supporters to view them – as an organization that existed through the ages – as well as what Lega expected of its followers – to be dedicated to the party. The party's supporters had to be

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<sup>162</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 159-161, 215; Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 150, 200-202.

<sup>163</sup> Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?', 31.

<sup>164</sup> Ralph W. Hood, Jr., Peter C. Hill, and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion. An Empirical Approach* (New York; London, 2009), 17, 18.

<sup>165</sup> No author, '16 giugno 1991 - a Pontida nasce "la potentissima" Repubblica del Nord', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 10; Giordano, 'A place called Padania?', 219; Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 160.

<sup>166</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 208; No author, '1 giugno 2000: La Lega acquista il prato di Pontida!', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Quinta Parte 2000*, 19. An example of when Pontida's grassland turned into a sacred place, see No author, '4 giugno 2000: Pontida - Bossi applaude all'apertura del presidente USA e attacca amato', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Quinta Parte 2000*, 19-24, here: 19.

<sup>167</sup> Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 76.

<sup>168</sup> Giordano, 'A place called Padania?', 219; Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 75.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibidem*, 76.

<sup>170</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, 'The Lega Nord Back in Government', *West European Politics* (2010), 33:6, 1318-1340, here: 1334.



convinced of the importance of the mission, but there were some inherent problems related to this legitimation and the role of Pontida therein. This is discussed in the next chapter.

In summation, as this chapter delved into an ethnicized identity, enemies and liturgy, it has shown that the sacralization of politics helped Lega to get involved in the lives of its supporters, but it did not function to build an alternative world that had to encompass all aspects of their lives and Lega thus stopped short of becoming a political religion during this period. Rather sacralization functioned to justify Lega's political goal, self-government for the North – within the context of being Italian – and legitimate the party's discourse. Within this moderate framework, Lega grasped the voters. This is why during the 1989-1995 period Lega's attempt to involve itself in the lives of its followers was limited. The sacralization of Lega's politics mainly existed as a means to an end.

## Chapter 2: 1995-2001

### *Secessionism and Padanian institutions*

From 1995 onwards, Lega moved increasingly away from the Italian state and towards a secessionist stance, as a consequence of losing many of its representatives to Berlusconi, and cries of Lega's radical constituency to end alliances and gain a stronger position vis-à-vis Rome. Cento Bull and Gilbert hint that the transformation towards secession started in January 1995 when one of Lega's bills, that aimed to create a federal state, was presented in parliament – although it was never voted on.<sup>171</sup> Based on the work by Cento Bull and Gilbert, and by Biorcio and Vitale, it can be reasoned that rather than agitate against what was happening *within* the Italian state, Lega now primarily stated that the problem *was* the Italian state.<sup>172</sup> Ruzza and Fella show that with the move towards secession, and while pleasing its radical activists and small-town supporters, Lega lost many of its more moderate and urban electorates.<sup>173</sup> At the end of May/start of June 1995, Lega took concrete steps by – as the Cronistoria described – establishing a *Parlamento del Nord* (Northern Parliament) that assembled in Mantua – the so-called capital of the Republic of the North – in order 'to guarantee the rights and the liberty of the people of the North [...]' and '[...] obtain the autonomy of the north.'<sup>174</sup> The parliament's aim, Cento Bull and Gilbert report, was to decide on the kind of federalism Lega wanted, to draw up a constitution for an autonomous northern state and it had to remind Lega's leading members to keep fighting for northern autonomy.<sup>175</sup> Lega's position at this point was ambivalent, floating between federalism and secession.

According to the Cronistoria by the end of 1995, Bossi declared in the Italian parliament that if those in power – at that moment in time the government was led by the independent politician Lamberto Dini whose cabinet existed of technocrats and whom Bossi up to that point had supported – remained undecided 'the fundamental choice, at this point, is between a federalist state or secession of the North: now, immediately!'<sup>176</sup> Bossi used secession as a threat for immediate reform and this phrase put the integrity and existence of the Italian state at the center of Lega's argument.

The 1996 general elections strengthened Lega's independent stance as it gained over 10% of the overall vote, the highest percentage in its history. Even so, a multi-party coalition of center and left formed a government under the leadership of the center-left politician Romano Prodi – leaving Lega in the opposition.<sup>177</sup> The Cronistoria described how, strengthened by the election results, on the fourth of

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<sup>171</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 105, 106.

<sup>172</sup> Ibidem, 112, 113; Biorcio and Vitale, 'Culture, Values and Social Basis', 177.

<sup>173</sup> Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 29.

<sup>174</sup> No author, '28 maggio 1995 - Assemblea Federale Lega Nord', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 33; No author, '7 giugno 1995 - 1° seduta del Parlamento del Nord a Mantova', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 33.

<sup>175</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 106.

<sup>176</sup> No author, '21 dicembre 1995 - Intervento alla camera: stato federalista o secessione', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 34, 35, here: 35. For the Dini government see Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 37.

<sup>177</sup> Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali, 'Camera 21/04/1996, Area Italia', *Archivio Storico delle Elezioni*; Giordano, 'Italian regionalism or "Padanian" nationalism', 456. For the Prodi-government see Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 106, 107. For more background also see Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 97.

May 1996 Bossi delivered a speech at the Northern Parliament – which in the near future would be changed into the Parliament of Padania – where he stated that federalism was now useless and secession the only solution. He proposed the independence of the northern state, which name should be changed to Padania. Simultaneously he proposed the foundation of a Padanian government.<sup>178</sup> Although highly symbolic, the Cronistoria presented it with an air of factuality. Nevertheless, it must be clear that secession and the subsequent establishment of a parliament and government by no means had any widespread legitimacy nor held any real power.

Even so, in his speech, quoted in the Cronistoria, Bossi argued that there were several stages in the process of independence and the last phase had now started: ‘[this is] the last great battle that Padania must do in order to succeed to liberate itself from the difficult and colonial situation in which we find ourselves.’<sup>179</sup> Bossi spoke of injustices committed by Italy, and the moral right to resist and to secession, after which he proposed that Padania should be declared a nation at Pontida.<sup>180</sup> Subsequently, the rules of the Padanian parliament were stipulated and the first article remarkably stated that ‘[t]he Parliament of Padania represents the population of the North which recognizes itself in the ideals of the political movement Lega Nord.’<sup>181</sup> Within the discourse that Bossi and Lega set out to construct, Lega Nord and Padania – represented in its parliament – were therefore indistinguishable. In theory, the parliament consisted of social democrats, liberals, conservatives, Catholics, and communists, but in reality – as Celiksu argues – it was a Leghisti undertaking.<sup>182</sup> This point is implicitly reiterated by Cento Bull and Gilbert, who place the word ‘parliament’ between quotation marks to describe its symbolic and unofficial nature.<sup>183</sup>

The Cronistoria subsequently described that on 12 May 1996 a Padanian government was created, among them a ministry for *Identità popolare della Padania*, of which Gilberto Oneto – editor-in-chief of Quaderni Padani – became minister.<sup>184</sup> Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro contends that the parliament and government functioned to build up an alternative legitimacy and create parallel institutions, at odds with the Italian ones – although even in the words of Lega’s chronicler, they were largely symbolic.<sup>185</sup> I contend that, even though symbolic, the parliament and government demonstrated that Lega wanted to involve itself further in the lives of its followers, to build an alternative world that

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<sup>178</sup> No author, ‘4 maggio 1996 - Parlamento di Mantova’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 3-7, here: 3, 4, 6, 7; No author, ‘24 marzo 1996 - Pontida’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 2; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 110.

<sup>179</sup> No author, ‘4 maggio 1996 - Parlamento di Mantova’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 3-7, here: 4.

<sup>180</sup> No author, ‘4 maggio 1996 - Parlamento di Mantova’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 3-7, here: 4, 7.

<sup>181</sup> No author, ‘Regolamento Del Parlamento Della Padania: Articolo 1 - Parlamento della Padania’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 8.

<sup>182</sup> Celiksu, *The making of the Padanian Nation*, 53, 54.

<sup>183</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 106, 112.

<sup>184</sup> No author, ‘Regolamento Del Parlamento Della Padania: Articolo 11 - Commissioni’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 10; No author, ‘12 maggio 1996 - Nasce Il Governo Sole’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 10, 11.

<sup>185</sup> Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, ‘A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?’, 99; No author, ‘12 maggio 1996 - Nasce Il Governo Sole’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 10, 11, here: 10.

had to encompass all aspects of its followers lives. Bossi's proposal for independence was put into effect during Lega's September congress in 1996. Bossi filled an ampoule with water at the source of the river Po and carried it all the way to Venice to perform an elaborate ceremony and symbolically declare independence.

In 1997 and 1998 Lega organized several demonstrations and referenda, and even held elections for the Padanian parliament which according to political geographer Fabrizio Eva were arranged to get people in favor of secession, but Cento Bull and Gilbert make clear that these were not incredibly successful.<sup>186</sup> In the months after the Declaration of Independence, a Padanian constitution was also drawn up. This was not an effortless process, rather – Cento Bull and Gilbert contend – it was cause for continuing conflict in the Padanian parliament. This problem was reflected in the special 25/26 issue of *Quaderni Padani*, in which several proposals were presented for a Padanian constitution. Cento Bull and Gilbert clarify that in the end the matter was left unresolved.<sup>187</sup>

The shift to secession has mainly been interpreted by political scientists and sociologists, but it leads too far to discuss all the possible interpretations.<sup>188</sup> Some views however stand out. Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro contends that secession was a strategy to maintain northern unity, for which Padania became the label.<sup>189</sup> Giordano argues that the notion of Padania attracted media attention, recreated a distinct identity (compromised while being part of the government), and restored the link with its activists.<sup>190</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert suggest that Bossi knew that with a secessionist policy he would be able to differentiate Lega substantially from other parties to a position where 'nobody would follow him.'<sup>191</sup> Ultimately, according to Ruzza and Fella, Biorcio and Vitale, and Cento Bull and Gilbert, the period of secession was a waste of time that effectively led to nothing more than fundamentalism, poor electoral performances, and a reduced role for Lega Nord in Italian politics.<sup>192</sup> More than that and as Callegaro states, in the end, secession 'revived only the hearts of the most radical members, but not those of the majority of its followers'.<sup>193</sup> As described in the introduction, Bossi realized this himself, moved away from secession towards devolution, and remade his pact with Berlusconi. The remaining part of this

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<sup>186</sup> Fabrizio Eva, 'The Unlikely Independence of Northern Italy', (unpublished; 1997), 1-21, here: 16; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 111, 112; No author, '25 maggio 1997 - I° Referendum Per La Secessione', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 20; No author, '26 ottobre 1997 - I° Elezioni Padane', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 22; No author, '31 gennaio 1998 - Manifestazione A Bergamo', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 29; No author, '18 marzo 1998 - Tutti A Modena!', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 29; No author, '16-23 aprile 1998 - La Lega Presenta 12 Referendum Alla Corte Costituzionale', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 30, 31.

<sup>187</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 117-119.

<sup>188</sup> See for example Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 106, 107; David Gilmour, *The pursuit of Italy. A history of a land, its regions and their peoples*, (London; 2011, 2012), 371; McDonnell, 'A weekend in Padania', 131; Celiksu, *The making of the Padanian Nation*, 24, 53, 55, 56

<sup>189</sup> Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 98.

<sup>190</sup> Giordano, 'The continuing transformation', 221.

<sup>191</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, Giordano, and Ruzza and Fella contend that, while the new leftist Prodi-government explained itself committed to federalism – as had most parties – secession became Lega Nord's main distinguishing feature. Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 108. See also Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 97; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 107, 108; Giordano, 'The continuing transformation', 220, 221; Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 29.

<sup>192</sup> Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 29-31; Biorcio and Vitale, 'Culture, Values and Social Basis', 178; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 6.

<sup>193</sup> Callegaro, *Nationalism in Contemporary Italian Politics*, 45.

chapter delves deeper into Lega's secessionist era as presented in the literature, and from the viewpoint of the Cronistoria and Quaderni Padani, starting in 1995 and lasting up to 2001.

### *Enemies*

During Lega's secessionist period, new enemies were added to the existing inventory. Quaderni Padani was an important driver of this process. The magazine argued that centralism was still Lega's main antagonist. According to the unknown Quaderni Padani author Silvio Lupo centralism was embodied by the Italian state, with a focus on Rome, both in its present-day form and as the Roman empire. Lupo argued that, historically, with the invasion and subsequent colonization of the Po Valley by the Roman Empire

Noble patricians, big capitalists, big profiteers, powerful generals and unscrupulous merchants rushed like vultures to Gaul, as contractors for military roads and fortifications, villas and public buildings to be built for the new masters and merchants (hoarders, [...], expropriators) of land, cattle and slaves. All this took place with the official purpose of "enhancing" the Cisalpine Gaul [Celts]. Like today: mafia and politicians manage state jobs, public housing and contracts.<sup>194</sup>

Lupo contended that the Romans supposedly arrived in Padania to help the local population, whom they however robbed, similar to the contemporary mafia and politicians. Interestingly the author equated mafia and politicians as two ends of the same stick, thereby referring to the *Mani Puliti* scandals of the early 1990s. Through the argument, the strong level of connectedness between the magazine and the political party is made visible, in which Quaderni Padani added to Lega's rhetoric of the political elite as thieves (*Roma Ladrona*).<sup>195</sup> Additionally, in the book-chapter 'Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League' by Cento Bull, the author argues, with regards to racism, that the other is considered as 'static' and whose 'cultural characteristics are inbred and unchangeable.'<sup>196</sup> Based on this notion, it can be argued that there is a perceived continuity of history in which an unchanging enemy – Rome – is always aiming to eradicate the unchanging protagonist – Padania. This image of exploitation and repression of freedom is repeatedly reiterated in Quaderni Padani. In 1997 and 1998, articles by active Lega member and editor of the magazine Alessandro Sorti and Oneto – under his editorial pseudonym Brenno – for example described central governments as the antonym of freedom while the modern nation-state was supposedly built on the premise of economic exploitation.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> The term Gauls and Celts is used interchangeably. Silvio Lupo, 'La storia si ripete: la conquista romana della Gallia Cisalpina', *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:4, 18-21, here: 20

<sup>195</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 13, 14.

<sup>196</sup> Cento Bull, 'Ethnicity, Racism and the Northern League', 173.

<sup>197</sup> Alessandro Sorti, 'Dalla Padania di Sant'Ambrogio a quella odierna Conversazione con Ettore A. Albertoni', *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:9, 3-8, here: 8; Brenno, 'Da Bava Beccaris a Violante', *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:16, 1-2, here: 1. Also see Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 111; Gilberto Oneto, 'Quegli autonomisti di duecento anni fa', *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:29, 81-84, here: 84. For Sorti's position as editor see for example the colophon of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> edition of Quaderni Padani. No author, 'Redazione', *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:10, 2; No author, 'Redazione', *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:16, 2. For his position as active member of Lega see No author, '2 novembre 1997 - Tutti i nomi degli eletti al Parlamento della Padania', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 23.

In a similar tone, modern-day Italy was also described by active Lega member Eugenio Fracassetti in a 2000 *Quaderni Padani* article as a ‘fascist state’, because no one ‘managed to untie that undemocratic political knot which since then [1861] has closely bound the Mediterranean peoples of the Italian peninsula with the continental peoples of the Po valley.’<sup>198</sup> Zúquete reiterates this point as being part of Lega’s rhetoric on the Italian Republic.<sup>199</sup> Additionally, in two editorials Oneto, and Lupo in the already mentioned article, argued that Italy was bent on repression and aimed to violently suppress all forms of identity and create a homogenized and uniform nation. In that spirit, Padanians – ethnically different from the rest of Italy – were supposedly being treated as second-rate citizens and exploited.<sup>200</sup>

According to several *Quaderni Padani* authors – consisting of both active Lega members, such as Ettore A. Albertoni, Michele Corti and Oneto, as well as Lottieri – the nation was forced from above, and no more than a façade to cover up clientelism, corruption and the dishonest interests of a few. The rigid centralism associated with it was an intolerant dogma of Italian political unity.<sup>201</sup> More than that, several *Quaderni Padani* authors – specifically the active party member Flavio Grisolia, as well as authors with whom no active connection with Lega was found, Maurizio G. Ruggiero, Francesco Mario Agnoli and Alina Mestriner Benassi, and Oneto – contended that the creation of the Italian state was part of a conspiracy, initiated by and with an important role for the Freemasons who came to the Italian peninsula during the French Revolution. Ruggiero described in a 2000 edition of *Quaderni Padani* that it was the Freemasons’ goal to ‘overthrow traditional sacred institutions’.<sup>202</sup> Based on two articles in the same edition, one written by active Lega member and editor of *Quaderni Padani* Andrea Rognoni and another by Fabio Bonaiti – with whom no active connection with Lega was found – these institutions referred to rooted ideals, values (family, property, faith), community, century-old customs and institutions.<sup>203</sup> According to two articles from 1998 and 2000 by Oneto and a 2000 article by

<sup>198</sup> Eugenio Fracassetti, ‘Il vero significato di “fascismo”’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:27, 46-49, here: 48. For Fracassetti’s position as active member of Lega see No author, ‘In corsa il figlio dell’ex doge De Michelis’, *La Nuova di Venezia e Mestre*, <[https://ricerca.gelocal.it/nuovavenezia/archivio/nuovavenezia/2004/05/15/VM6VM\\_VM603.html](https://ricerca.gelocal.it/nuovavenezia/archivio/nuovavenezia/2004/05/15/VM6VM_VM603.html)> [accessed 14 June 2022].

<sup>199</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 115.

<sup>200</sup> Lupo, ‘La storia si ripete: la conquista romana della Gallia Cisalpina’, 20; Brenno, ‘Da Bava Beccaris a Violante’, 1; Brenno, ‘Padania: è solo l’inizio Riflessioni sul momento politico della Lega e del Movimento indipendentista’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:17, 1-6, here: 5. See also Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 36; Fabio Bartaletti, ‘Italianità e realtà padano-alpina’, *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:14, 32-37.

<sup>201</sup> Ettore A. Albertoni, ‘Crisi italiana e Padania come? La transizione ed i progetti di legge costituzionale d’iniziativa dei popoli bergamasco e vicentino per l’attuazione e la riforma della Costituzione della repubblica Italiana in materia di autonomia dell’ordinamento dello Stato e dei Comuni, delle Province e delle Regioni.’, *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:25/26, 14-22, here: 17; Michele Corti, ‘L’ “identità nazionale italiana”: un mito evanescente. I contorni ideologici-politici, cattolicesimo e stato “nazionale”’, *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:3, 20-27, here: 22-24; Brenno, ‘La pelosa dittatura dei punti esclamativi’, *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:6, 18-19, here: 19. See also Lottieri, ‘Neofederalismo e “piccole patrie”: per superare lo Stato moderno’, 10-14. For Albertoni’s position as active member of Lega see No author, ‘Regionali2000, Risultati Elettorali’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Quinta Parte 2000*, 9-13, here: 10. For Corti’s position as active member of Lega see No author, ‘Settembre 1991 - dieta di Mantova: il tradimento di Franco Castellazzi’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 10, 11, here: 11.

<sup>202</sup> Maurizio G. Ruggiero, ‘Le Pasque Veronesi’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:29, 50-55, here: 50; Flavio Grisolia, ‘Viva Maria! Le insorgenze liguri anti-giacobine (1792-1814)’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:29, 11-26, here: 16; Francesco Mario Agnoli, ‘L’insorgenza in Emilia e Romagna’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:29, 63-80, here: 66.

<sup>203</sup> Andrea Rognoni, ‘Per una geofilosofia delle Insorgenze padane’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:29, 1-4; Fabio Bonaiti, ‘Le insorgenze anti-giacobine bergamasche (29-30 marzo 1797)’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:29, 48-49, here: 49. See also Mariella Pintus, ‘Insorgenze piemontesi e partigiani “barbetti” dell’epoca napoleonica’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:29, 33-37. For Rognoni’s position as editor see for example the colophon of the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of *Quaderni Padani*. No author, ‘Redazione’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:17, 2. For his position as

Mestriner Benassi, the Freemasons influenced the Risorgimento, were at the center of Italian unity – which Oneto described as ‘a violent military act’ – and lived on in the political left, guided politics, the media and were even at the center of globalization.<sup>204</sup> They were the antagonists that initiated and guided a centuries-long conspiracy against Lega which highlights right (Lega and Padania) from wrong (centralism, masons). Zúquete shows that the belief in a conspiracy guided by the Masons is part of Lega’s discourse, contrasting good and evil. As the examples above show, Quaderni Padani brought depth to Lega’s view on Italian centralism.<sup>205</sup>

Globalization was no less a homogenizing and exploiting force.<sup>206</sup> Zúquete quotes a 1999 interview in *La Padania*, in which Bossi stated: ‘the ideologues of globalization are allied with international bankers ... they want to reduce the man to a microbe, alone in front of globalization, without links, without traditions, without a sense of belonging to a community. In sum, the project of the Masonry: “without family, without house, without God, without religion, without children.”’<sup>207</sup> Fremeaux and Albertazzi, Zúquete and Woods show that an overall negative position on globalization was part of Lega’s discourse.<sup>208</sup> The party’s argument was supported and deepened by several Quaderni Padani authors. A combination of articles in Quaderni Padani by active Lega member Silvano Straneo, Oneto and the unknown Davide Gianetti argued that the anti-Lega conspiracy was once more working against Padania as distant centers of power, led by a powerful group of bankers, aimed to create a world-government that controlled information and imposed patterns of behavior that served their interests. At the heart of this was liberal capitalism: a destructive, fallible and degenerating economic doctrine that destroyed any ethnic culture and identity that did not learn to adapt. The various authors argued that the purpose of globalization was to create an atomized and individualistic society where, in the end, there would only exist a dichotomy between consumers and producers, where the family as an institution was dismantled, ethnicity was exchanged for a multicultural society and where a world-government would hold the reigns.<sup>209</sup> Fremeaux and Albertazzi point to a likely cause for the anti-globalization attitude in

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active member of Lega see No author, ‘LUCIO DALLA, Andrea Rognoni: “Un cattocomunista di un’Italia che non vorremmo”’, *BolognaToday*, <<https://www.bolognotoday.it/cronaca/lucio-dalla-lega-rognoni-radio-padania.html>> [accessed 14 June 2022].

<sup>204</sup> Brenno, ‘Da Bava Beccaris a Violante’, 1. *Ibidem*, 1, 2; Oneto, ‘Quegli autonomisti di duecento anni fa’, 81; Alina Mestriner Benassi, ‘Padri della (loro) patria Mazzini e la Massoneria’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:30, 5-9.

<sup>205</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 128, 129, 191, 192. Also see Celiksu, *The making of the Padanian Nation*, 127, 136.

<sup>206</sup> Not all authors are as negative in their perception of globalisation. Ettore A. Albertoni, presents a more nuanced view. He is a proponent of *globlocal* (technological and economic globalization, but at the same time strengthening of local identities and autonomies), and supposedly strives towards a federal Europe. Ettore A. Albertoni, ‘Globalizzazione e federazione dei popoli e delle regioni’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:28, 49-51, here: 50. The term *globlocal* seems to be termed either by Albertoni himself or Quaderni Padani.

<sup>207</sup> ‘Intervista a Umberto Bossi’, *La Padania* (15 May 1999), quoted in Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 129.

<sup>208</sup> Fremeaux and Albertazzi, ‘Discursive strategies around “Community”’, 155; Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 123, 124, 128, 130, 131, 132, 194; Dwayne Woods, ‘Pockets of resistance to globalization: The case of the Lega Nord’, *Patterns of Prejudice* (2009), 43:2, 161-177, here: 168-170.

<sup>209</sup> Silvano Straneo, ‘Globalizzazione, mondialismo è identità dei popoli’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:31, 3-13; Silvano Straneo, ‘Introduzione ai lavori’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:28, 44; Silvano Straneo, ‘La fine delle ideologie Qualche considerazione a partire dagli avvenimenti del 1989’, *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:14, 3-5, here: 4, 5; Brenno, ‘Voglia di Europa’, *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:21, 1-2, here: 2; Davide Gianetti, ‘Se il libero mercato diventa ideologia’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:31, 18-19. For Straneo’s position as active member of Lega see No author, ‘Lega Nord’, *Stringfixer*, <[https://stringfixer.com/nl/Lega\\_Nord](https://stringfixer.com/nl/Lega_Nord)> [accessed 14 June 2022].

which the virtue of Padania's work-ethic was opposed to globalization's economic interests that wanted to profit from cheap labor.<sup>210</sup>

The European Union (EU), with a special focus on the European Monetary Union (EMU), was at the forefront of this discussion on globalization. Woods and Giordano contend that until the integration of Italy into the EMU, the party's position on the EU was ambivalent. On the one hand, the EU represented bureaucratism and elitism. On the other hand, if the north integrated more with a European economy, it could supposedly decrease the power of the central state, obtain some level of autonomy and the introduction of the Euro would benefit small business owners, additionally shielding them against international changes in the division of labor.<sup>211</sup> Giordano shows that Lega gambled that the condition of the Italian economy (with its high public-sector deficit) would prevent Italy from joining the Euro. Independently the North would supposedly meet the required criteria.<sup>212</sup> Quaderni Padani authors followed suit in various 1995 to 1997 articles, such as the aforementioned Corti, Sorti, Oneto, and editor of Quaderni Padani Alessandro Vitale, who similarly argued that Padania could perhaps enter the EU independently.<sup>213</sup> Woods argues that overall, from 1995 to 1998, Lega was 'supportive of European integration and global trade'.<sup>214</sup>

McDonnell, Zúquete and Woods contend that by 1998 the position shifted to outright hostility and Quaderni Padani showed itself once more a loyal subject to the party line.<sup>215</sup> Articles against liberal capitalism and the EU appeared in Quaderni Padani when it became clear that Italy as a whole would enter the EMU, and hope for more autonomy was blown in the wind. According to an early 1999 article by Oneto, the EU ran the risk of becoming yet another bureaucratic, centralist artificial and anonymous construction as long as it did not do justice to a Europe of Peoples – which Quaderni Padani author Stefano Spagocci (with whom no active connection with Lega was found) described as a Celtic Europe.<sup>216</sup> On more economic grounds, Woods contends that Lega argued that the EU acted not 'as a shield against the negative effects of globalization but as a trojan horse by pushing for low tariffs, welcoming Chinese entry into the WTO and sanctioning member states that hampered EU-wide competition.'<sup>217</sup> To Lega, Woods continued, globalization and the EU became a threat to Padanian identity and its wealth.<sup>218</sup> All the while, Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro contends that Europe and

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<sup>210</sup> Fremeaux and Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community"', 155.

<sup>211</sup> Giordano, 'Italian regionalism or "Padanian" nationalism', 465; Woods, 'Pockets of resistance to globalization: The case of the Lega Nord', 164.

<sup>212</sup> Giordano, 'The continuing transformation', 221. Albertazzi and McDonnell argued along a similar line. See Albertazzi and McDonnell, 'The Lega Nord in the second Berlusconi government', 955.

<sup>213</sup> Michele Corti, 'Padania-Italia: quale «questione nazionale»? Considerazioni storiche, politiche ed economiche', *Quaderni Padani* (1995), 1:2, 15-25, here: 15, 16; Alessandro Sorti, 'I fondamenti del diritto di secessione per la Padania', *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:5, 7-10, here: 8; Gilberto Oneto, 'La volontà di stare con chi si vuole', *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:5, 11-16, here: 16; Alessandro Vitale, 'La Padania e i nuovi Paesi dell'Est: il caso dei rapporti con la Croazia', *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:9, 22-26, here: 24-26. See also Woods, 'Pockets of resistance to globalization', 164. For Vitale's position as editor see for example the colophon of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> edition of *Quaderni Padani*. No author, 'Redazione', *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:10, 2; No author, 'Redazione', *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:16, 2.

<sup>214</sup> Woods, 'Pockets of resistance to globalization', 161.

<sup>215</sup> McDonnell, 'A weekend in Padania', 128, 129; Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 125, 126; Woods, 'Pockets of resistance to globalization', 165.

<sup>216</sup> Brenno, 'Voglia di Europa', 1, 2; Stefano Spagocci, 'Celti romanizzati, ma Celti', *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:30, 10-13.

<sup>217</sup> Woods, 'Pockets of resistance to globalization', 165.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibidem*, 176, 177.



*Europeanness* were central to a Padanian identity. Lega claimed the North's distinctiveness from Italy precisely because it was European.<sup>219</sup>

Based on the work by Cento Bull and Gilbert, Hine, Fremeaux and Albertazzi, and Albertazzi and McDonnell, it can be argued that the discussion on the EU was at the center of a delicate balance between economic development and identity in which in the end the latter triumphed over the former, giving way to a fortress mentality. Albertazzi and McDonnell show that in the negation of liberal capitalism and the EU, Lega lost a large part of its main constituency of small business owners – for whom European integration was crucial, as they produced for the (inter)national market or the public sector. In the process, Lega isolated itself and Padania.<sup>220</sup> As a result, Forza Italia swept away Lega's votes in the 2001 elections.<sup>221</sup>

Christianity suffered a similar ambivalent fate in the second half of the 1990s. On the one hand, and as Zúquete described, Lega argued that the Catholic Church was a 'natural enemy', and Quaderni Padani once again deepened the argument. The unknown Quaderni Padani author Diego Barnelli in an early 1998 article described Christianity as a foreign and intolerant Middle-Eastern religion that was brought in with the Roman conquest. It tried to erase the local northern Celtic religion with something totally foreign to it.<sup>222</sup> On the other hand, as Huyseune showed, Lega attributed itself a Christian morality.<sup>223</sup> Oneto in various Quaderni Padani articles from 1996, 1998 and 1999 added to this point by arguing that Padania had a strong Christian character, for example through the association with the Cross of Saint George – which according to Oneto was the hallmark of Padania – as well as through the integration of Celtic characteristics, such as Halloween, into Christianity. Overall Oneto argued that Christianity was an inherent part of Padanian identity, which should be associated with the independence struggle.<sup>224</sup> Albertazzi and McDonnell argue that the contradiction between Christianity as a foreign entity and as an inherent part, was one Lega – and as can be seen from the sources above, Quaderni Padani – was unable to resolve.<sup>225</sup> Quaderni Padani nevertheless tried to do so on behalf of Lega, and Oneto in two articles from 1997 and 1998 argued that rather than being part of a Roman Church, there was – as there had supposedly been for centuries – a Padanian Church, *our Church*, a church that was strongly tied to Celtic traditions and associated with the independence struggle. In the

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<sup>219</sup> Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 83, 98.

<sup>220</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 103; Hine, 'Federalism, Regionalism and the Unitary State', 126; Fremeaux and Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community"', 155, 156; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 'The Lega Nord in the second Berlusconi government', 961, 962; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 'Separati in Casa?', 6, 7. See also Jason Sorens, 'Regionalists Against Secession: The Political Economy of Territory in Advanced Democracies', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* (2008), 14:3, 325-360, here: 331, 350.

<sup>221</sup> Giordano, 'The continuing transformation', 225.

<sup>222</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 126, 127; Diego Barnelli, 'Per un recupero della religiosità ancestrale', *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:15, 30-31, here: 30, 31.

<sup>223</sup> Huyseune, 'Imagined Geographies', 214.

<sup>224</sup> Gilberto Oneto, 'Le lùmere, antico segno di celtismo padano', *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:21, 14-20; Gilberto Oneto, 'La bandiera Padana', *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:4, 10-17, here: 12-15; Brenno, 'Padania: è solo l'inizio Riflessioni sul momento politico della Lega e del Movimento indipendentista', 4.

<sup>225</sup> Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?', 32. See also Albertazzi and McDonnell, 'Separati in Casa?', 13, 14.

aptly named article, ‘We, the Padanian Church’ Oneto stated that ‘[o]ur church has grown with our civilization, with our communities, with our liberties.’<sup>226</sup>

A 1998 editorial by Oneto shows that through the Padanian Church-argument Lega intended to differentiate itself from the Catholic Roman curia and their involvement in politics and finance, while simultaneously still propagating Lega’s Christian character. However, in the same editorial Oneto argued that by attacking the Catholic Church, the party alienated a large group of Catholic followers.<sup>227</sup> From 1999 onwards therefore, Lega – in the words of Albertazzi – turned into ‘the “bastion” of Christianity *vis a vis* the advance of Muslim cultures.’<sup>228</sup> Lega and Quaderni Padani turned more pro-Christian – boasting Christian and traditional values – and became more vocally anti-Islam.<sup>229</sup> Besides regaining its Catholic followers, Passarelli, and Albertazzi and McDonnell suggest that with this turn Lega hoped to gain a more right-wing constituency.<sup>230</sup>

In a 1999 Quaderni Padani editorial by Oneto the various enemies described above came together. The author described Rome, communism and Islam as the core enemies of Padania. Separately they had particular characteristics. Rome stood for violence, genocide and cultural cleansing; communism for keeping people in misery; and Islam represented aggression. They worked together – a ‘demonic triad’ – to vanquish Padania and each enemy brought its own skillset to the table:

[C]ommunism strangled by history has transformed itself, like a grim mutant, into social democracy, into do-goodness, into solidarity, into a somewhat sacristan regime, a little mafia and a little (inevitably) Stalinist; Rome is always the same forge of intolerant centralism, of economic robbery, of colonialist brutality and of bureaucratic and police oppression; Islam reappears with the invasion of masses of apparent dispossessed who, behind the mask of exiles and victims, hide the impertinence and arrogance of all the time, the propensity for violence and aggressive deceit, for religious intolerance and for the worst undemocratic absolutism. To keep them together is like the glue of globalism, the enemy of all differences (like communism), of all autonomy (like Rome), of all tolerance (like Islam) and of every aspiration to freedom (like all three).<sup>231</sup>

Oneto thus disentangled the various enemies to pinpoint their specific characteristics, only to re-entangle them in the end, making them into the centerpieces of globalization, conspiring to destroy the Padanian community. This is part of Lega’s conspiracy discourse in which – Zúquete describes – Lega believes that ‘a powerful and demonic alliance of enemies [...] work and conspire together in order to put an end to the community.’<sup>232</sup> Additionally, Zúquete, and Cento Bull and Gilbert argue that Lega referred to an intricate connection between national and international powers collaborating to destroy

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<sup>226</sup> Brenno, ‘Noi, Chiesa Padana’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:18, 1-3, here: 1. See also Brenno, ‘Noi, Celti e Longobardi Ma anche Garalditani, Liguri, Veneti e Goti’, *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:12, 1-2, here: 2.

<sup>227</sup> Brenno, ‘Padania: è solo l’inizio Riflessioni sul momento politico della Lega e del Movimento independentista’, 4.

<sup>228</sup> Albertazzi, ‘“Back to our roots” or self-confessed manipulation?’, 32. Italics in original.

<sup>229</sup> See also Albertazzi, ‘“Back to our roots” or self-confessed manipulation?’, 33; Schwörer, ‘Right-wing populist parties as defender of Christianity? The case of the Italian Northern League’, 409, 410.

<sup>230</sup> Passarelli, ‘Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe’, 66; Albertazzi and McDonnell, ‘Separati in Casa?’, 18, 19.

<sup>231</sup> Brenno, ‘Contro i tre peggiori morbi della storia’, *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:22/23, 1-2, here: 2.

<sup>232</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 192, 193.

the ethnic identities, and in that sense, Oneto's article was not an isolated case, but a recurring argument within Lega's discourse. As the examples on the Freemasons and globalization above also demonstrated, Quaderni Padani played an important role in the construction of this discourse.<sup>233</sup>

Additionally, Zúquete and Celiksu show that part of Lega's discourse was that northern Italians had supposedly always successfully rebelled against these enemies and must continue to do so until good or evil prevailed. Zúquete argues that if the former prevailed, Lega believed that a new age of freedom, prosperity and diversity would be brought about, not just for Padania but for the whole world.<sup>234</sup> It is in the description of this evil and the possibility to prevail that an analogy must be drawn with Christianity, which tells its followers that in the struggle between good and evil, the former will triumph over the latter and prosperity will be brought about.<sup>235</sup> Within Lega's context, for good to triumph and to achieve the goal of freedom, history had to be rewritten or even (re-)invented from a Padanian perspective and this was never developed as much as between 1995 and 2001. In this setting, the unknown Quaderni Padani author Berardo Maggi (whom Albertazzi considered a *leghisti*) argued that a 'rediscovered' heritage had to be used to consciously contrast it with Italian culture – even if, as Albertazzi and Eva indicate, there was no clear historical basis for this claim.<sup>236</sup> This 'rediscovered' past is the focus of the next section.

On the whole and as described in the previous chapter, Lega's enemies had an important role in the party's discourse. Were before 1995 they functioned to give legitimacy to Lega's political project, from 1995 onwards they were central to building up an alternative truth for its followers in which a supposed good stood against a supposed evil and the former had to combat the latter.

### *What is Padania?*

*[A] story in many ways still shrouded in legend and in the mists of heroic eras, in which were forged in the myths of Blood and Earth, our people and our story of men and peoples.*<sup>237</sup>

Lega and several voluntary and connected organizations created a Padanian discourse that had to demonstrate that Padania was different from these enemies and according to Huysseune highlighted 'the historical, cultural, linguistic and ethnic unity of Padanians as well as their common interests'.<sup>238</sup> The aim was to turn Padania into a – what Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro terms – self-evident cultural and economic unit.<sup>239</sup> Quaderni Padani had an important role in this. In several Quaderni Padani articles Oneto, for instance, told its readers that Padania consisted of many communities, that all had their own

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<sup>233</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 124; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 127, 128, 132, 133.

<sup>234</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 132, 158, 179, 196-200; Celiksu, *The making of the Padanian Nation*, 125.

<sup>235</sup> For a view on comparisons between political practices and traditional religions see Herman Paul, 'Religion and Politics: In Search of Resemblances', in: Joost Augusteijn, Patrick Dassen and Maartje Janse (ed.), *Political Religion beyond totalitarianism: the sacralization of politics in the age of democracy*, (Chippenham, 2013), 15-32, here: 24, 25, 28.

<sup>236</sup> Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?', 22, 26; Eva, 'Deconstructing Italy', 105; Berardo Maggi, 'Anche i Celti possono aiutarci ad ottenere l'indipendenza', *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:6, 20-23, here: 22, 33.

<sup>237</sup> Andrea Mascetti, 'I Celti: la prima Padania', *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:15, 3-14, here: 4.

<sup>238</sup> Huysseune, 'Landscapes as a symbol of nationhood', 358.

<sup>239</sup> Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, 'A Territorial Cleavage in Italian Politics?', 98.

history, identity and traditions. There was unity in this diversity, expressed in the various groups that supposedly managed to live together, cooperate and fight a common enemy to achieve freedom. This unity was famously represented through a medieval coalition of cities, the Lega Lombarda – discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>240</sup> Lega Lombarda's act of resistance and the corresponding Oath of Pontida taught contemporary Padanians that – in the words of Elena Percivaldi, editor of *Quaderni Padani* and whose work was considered party literature by Albertazzi and McDonnell – ‘as long as they remained united, there was never an enemy powerful enough to oppose their forces.’<sup>241</sup> There were similar events, showing the northern unity in diversity throughout history. Oneto in a 2000 article for example argued that there were insurgents who fought against the French invaders and later the Italian patriots. He wrote

We feel very close to those [...] who took up their rifles to defend (also and above all) their local freedoms, their ancient autonomies, the management of their resources, work and the land with which they reaffirmed the strength of an ancient bond like the world. Today we too want a world made up of many Heimat built on recognized deep identities, today we too want to return to exercising the natural right to be masters in our home, to fully dispose of the fruits of our work, to defend the sacrosanct right to property which means - above all else - the control of the land of our fathers and mothers and of our glorious flags.<sup>242</sup>

As the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Padanian insurgents – who according to Oneto rose to protect and defend their religion, traditions, ancient rights and their differences – now Padanians had to do the same to protect their homelands.<sup>243</sup> History was thus used to create a story of a united front of Padanians that through time fought against all sorts of evil in their defense of independence. The image Oneto wanted to convey and which he referred to in his 1996 article was that a strong and free Padania could be achieved by working together.<sup>244</sup> The unity-in-diversity argument within the *Quaderni Padani* articles originated out of the need within Lega's discourse to bring together the multitude of local identities in Northern Italy which however, Fremeaux and Albertazzi show, proved unfruitful. More than that, they argue that it was a contradiction at the party's core propaganda. While there was a recognition of the diversity in Northern Italy, Padania was simultaneously a fortress under threat by cultures that were too different from it.<sup>245</sup> Nevertheless, within this setting of unity-in-diversity various *Quaderni Padani* authors attempted to construct an all-encompassing past that had to bring Lega's followers together and legitimate the Padanian nation.

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<sup>240</sup> Oneto, ‘Quegli autonomisti di duecento anni fa’, 84; Oneto, ‘Federico II e il falso Carroccio’, 31; Brenno, ‘La diversità ci unisce’, *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:8, 1, 2, here: 2.

<sup>241</sup> Percivaldi, ‘Il giuramento di Pontida tra leggenda e realtà’, 54; Albertazzi and McDonnell, ‘Separati in Casa?’, 13. For Percivaldi's position as editor see for example the colophon of the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of *Quaderni Padani*. No author, ‘Redazione’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:17, 2.

<sup>242</sup> Oneto, ‘Quegli autonomisti di duecento anni fa’, 84.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibidem*, 84.

<sup>244</sup> Oneto, ‘La volontà di stare con chi si vuole’, 16.

<sup>245</sup> Albertazzi, ‘“Back to our roots” or self-confessed manipulation?’, 21, 35, 36; Fremeaux and Albertazzi, ‘Discursive strategies around “Community”’, 148, 151, 152, 157.

## Padanian history

*We are the heirs of the warriors of the stele statues and of Mount Bego, of the first great people of Europe, even if now history has forced us on this strip of land between mountains and sea.*<sup>246</sup>

Building on Da Giussano and the ancient Lega Lombarda, from 1995 onwards the development of Padanian history gained momentum and Quaderni Padani was one of its main advocates. First of all, and despite a strong element of diversity, according to several Quaderni Padani authors – Corti, Straneo, Vitale, and the unknown author Giulia Caminada Lattuada – Padanians supposedly shared common elements, distinguishing them from the rest of Italy. They referred to a style and standard of living, a specific type of ethics and values, a rational mentality, an entrepreneurial spirit, industriousness (*laboriosità*) and an innovative nature, rooted in a strong ‘civic spirit’.<sup>247</sup> According to an article by the unknown Quaderni Padani author Alberto Fossati (whose work Albertazzi refers to as party literature), many of these features could supposedly be traced back to the Padanian forefathers – Celts, Longobards and Ligurians – of which Bossi spoke at Pontida and Zúquete argued that they were central to Lega’s discourse on Padania.<sup>248</sup>

According to an article by Oneto in the first edition of Quaderni Padani, the symbol of this unity was the *Sole delle Alpi* (The Sun of the Alps; see *Image 1*).<sup>249</sup> It was visible on Lega Lombarda’s flag since the beginning, it became the symbol of Quaderni Padani and Lega Nord, and it was clearly noticeable during the 1996 declaration of independence.<sup>250</sup>



*Image 1: Il Sole delle Alpi.*

Oneto contends that the symbol was endowed with many ancient and profound meanings: sun, circle, wheel, flower and religious sign – both Christian and Celtic.<sup>251</sup> According to him, it was not an artifact, but a symbol with popular everyday use in art, visible on buildings, costumes, tools etcetera – objects that were vital for the survival of the community.<sup>252</sup> At the same time, Albertazzi contends that Oneto believed it was a symbol used mainly by the lower classes and unknown among the aristocracy, which

<sup>246</sup> Flavio Grisolia, ‘L’origine dell’identità ligure’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:15, 44-46, here: 46.

<sup>247</sup> Corti, ‘Padania-Italia: quale «questione nazionale»? Considerazioni storiche, politiche ed economiche’, 19, 20; Straneo, ‘La fine delle ideologie Qualche considerazione a partire dagli avvenimenti del 1989’, 3-5; Giulia Caminada Lattuada, ‘In Bassano per i Remondini’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:18, 44-50; Alessandro Vitale, ‘L’illusione della “debole” o “inesistente” identità padana’, *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:8, 9-13, here 11.

<sup>248</sup> Alberto Fossati, ‘Alcuni interessanti aspetti di Stato e Legge Longobarda. Le scelte degli avi ci influenzano tuttora e sono modello di autodeterminazione’, *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:5, 17-21, here: 17, 18; Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 112, 113. See also Flavio Grisolia, ‘Le origini delle identità padane’, *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:10, 7-31; Albertazzi, “‘Back to our roots” or self-confessed manipulation?”, 26.

<sup>249</sup> Gilberto Oneto, ‘Il “Sole delle Alpi”, simbolo Padano’, *Quaderni Padani* (1995), 1:1, 3-6, here: 3. For Image 1 see Oneto, ‘Il “Sole delle Alpi”, simbolo Padano’, 3.

<sup>250</sup> iBossi2010, ‘1996 Dichiarazione d’Indipendenza della Padania’, *YouTube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHnSa2buvmw>> [accessed 06 April 2019].

<sup>251</sup> A Christian (Sol Invictus: invincible sun (god); initially a Roman cult and later symbol for Christ) and Celtic symbol (in which ‘Lug’ is the god of light). Oneto, ‘Il “Sole delle Alpi”, simbolo Padano’, 5. See also Pieter Devlaminck, ‘De Cultus van Sol Invictus. Een vergelijkende studie tussen keizer Elagabal (218-222) en keizer Aurelianus (270-275)’, *e-thesis* <<http://www.ethesis.net/invictus/invictus.htm>> [accessed 07 September 2020].

<sup>252</sup> Oneto, ‘Il “Sole delle Alpi”, simbolo Padano’, 6.

I believe had to exemplify Lega's anti-elitist attitude.<sup>253</sup> Most of all, its function was obviously political. Oneto stated in the 1995 article: 'Now that this land is struggling to recover its deepest culture, there cannot be a more ancient, rich and popular seal than this which means light, fecundity and an eternal return to one's own tradition and their oldest roots.'<sup>254</sup> In Lega's discourse, the Sole delle Alpi thus had to show the perceived continuity of Padania over the ages. It was associated with ancient and religious connotations, grounding it in the past, but at the same time, it supposedly had a strong popular and political use today, making the symbol accessible to a wide audience. The extensive description on the Sole delle Alpi by Oneto however suggests that it was not as widely accepted as was the claim and had to be justified as it *being* a symbol of Padania.<sup>255</sup>

The unity supposedly found in its main symbol was equally visible in the Padanian forefathers who according to Oneto's 1997 book *L'Invenzione della Padania*, quoted by Fremeaux and Albertazzi,



Image 2: A visual representation of the Padanian forefathers.

illustrated Padania's 'homogenous disunity'.<sup>256</sup> In a 1997 Quaderni Padani article Oneto described that there were certain physical aspects pertaining to each forefather (see Image 2), and each attributed specific characteristics to the modern Padanians.<sup>257</sup>

[...] the Padanians have taken the spirit of sacrifice and stubbornness of the Ligurians, the joy, imagination and love for beauty of the Celts and the determination and sense of order and discipline of the Longobards. From all three they took courage, a sense of justice, love for work and, above all, the desire for freedom and civic conscience. In fact, the sense of the local community [...] was solidly rooted in all these ancestors of ours, which gave life to the municipal civilization and the spirit of autonomy of today. All were intolerant of oppression and bullying, and were enemies of any authoritarian, centralist and imperialist construction; all elected their own leaders [...]. It can be said that the desire for autonomy, the sense of community, and the invention of federalism derive from all of our ancestors in equal measure.<sup>258</sup>

<sup>253</sup> Albertazzi, "“Back to our roots” or self-confessed manipulation?", 29.

<sup>254</sup> Oneto, 'Il "Sole delle Alpi", simbolo Padano', 6.

<sup>255</sup> For another symbol also see the already mentioned Cross of Saint George. Oneto, 'La bandiera Padana', 12, 13, 15; Oneto, 'Il ruolo della Padania nell'eterna lotta fra l'Europa e l'Islam', 33; Flavio Grisolia, 'I Liguri e l'Islam', *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:22/23, 51-63, here: 54; Elena Percivaldi, 'I Padani alle Crociate', *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:22/23, 47-50. Based on several Quaderni Padani articles, references could be made to a variety of other invented symbols, for example the Iron Crown, the winged lion, and many more. These symbols were however not at the centre of Lega's symbolic capital. Brenno, 'Contro i tre peggiori morbi della storia', 2; Aldo Moltifiori, 'Una corona per il Sole delle Alpi', *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:11, 31-33.

<sup>256</sup> Gilberto Oneto, *L'Invenzione della Padania*, (Bergamo, 1997), 93, quoted in Fremeaux and Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community"', 151.

<sup>257</sup> Oneto states that Ligurians are robust and heavy-set, with brown hair and eyes; Celts are tall and lighter in complexion and hair, with grey and green eyes; Longobards and other Germans as the tallest, most robust, with blond hair and blue eyes. Brenno, 'Noi, Celti e Longobardi Ma anche Garalditani, Liguri, Veneti e Goti', 2. For Image 2 see Brenno, 'Noi, Celti e Longobardi Ma anche Garalditani, Liguri, Veneti e Goti', 1.

<sup>258</sup> Brenno, 'Noi, Celti e Longobardi Ma anche Garalditani, Liguri, Veneti e Goti', 2.

By making it explicit, the references to specific characteristics of the forefathers aimed to instill the view that they were somehow particular to Padanians and absent, above all, in Italians. Although there were many differences among them, they all strove to defend their diversity, autonomy and freedom. Based on Mosse's references to 'transcendent ideals' and the 'Volkish soul' in the case of German nationalism, it can be argued that Oneto suggested that the ideals of diversity, autonomy and freedom supposedly gave Padanians an inner substance that was unchanging.<sup>259</sup>

In addition, the Celts held a crucial place in Quaderni Padani's thinking and Huysseune makes clear that at the time of secession, Celtic heritage as part of a Padanian identity was ferociously constructed and advocated by Lega.<sup>260</sup> According to a 1997 editorial by Oneto, the Celts heavily influenced Christianity, the location of the settlements, art, and food. 'Celtic is the taste for color, light and decoration that have characterized the art of Padania for millennia, definitely Celtic is the taste for good food and good wine.'<sup>261</sup> The Celts were of such importance, that an entire 1998 edition of Quaderni Padani was devoted to a romanticized (admitted by the unknown author, Giorgio Fumagalli, himself) Celtic history.<sup>262</sup> According to Quaderni Padani author Gualtiero Ciola – with whom no active connection with Lega was found, but whose work Albertazzi used as party literature – Padania was in fact ethnically and culturally united because of the Celts: 'the Gallic substratum constitutes the glue capable of unifying the populations of the Po Valley in a cultural and political league, homogeneous in mentality and traditions'.<sup>263</sup> The Celts were thus central to Padanian ethnicity and culture. Furthermore, they were *the* example of unity in diversity. Albertazzi, and Fremeaux and Albertazzi state that according to party literature the Celts only came together when facing an external threat – an example that was followed by the Longobards, the ancient Lega Lombarda and that, according to Oneto, today's Padanians had to follow again to achieve freedom and prosperity.<sup>264</sup>

A recurring theme in the description of this Celtic past was a Europe of Peoples, a Europe that supposedly had one spirit, one idea of culture and of the world – a Celtic world.

It is a Europe of blood, feelings, identity, history, made up of common ancestors, of eternal gods of stone and water, of bell towers and virgin mothers as dark as the earth, of heroes, of songs, of mead, of industrious peoples and brazen armies, of a thousand colors and legends. [...] It is a nation of nations, it is a community of peoples who are brothers in heart and culture. [...] There are men and women, and families who feel part of their local community, of their small homeland, of their people and, finally, of the European ecumene.<sup>265</sup>

The argument was made in a 1999 Quaderni Padani editorial by Oneto, when it was clear that Italy would enter the EMU, and in the eyes of Lega the union itself turned into a bureaucratic and centralist

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<sup>259</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 81, 82, 102.

<sup>260</sup> Huysseune, 'Landscapes as a symbol of nationhood', 357.

<sup>261</sup> Brenno, 'Noi, Celti e Longobardi Ma anche Garalditani, Liguri, Veneti e Goti', 2

<sup>262</sup> Giorgio Fumagalli, 'La Rosa Riffiorita. Storia romanzata della lotta dei Galli cisalpini' *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:19, 1-119.

<sup>263</sup> Gualtiero Ciola, 'L'unità etno-culturale della Padania', *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:12, 3-6, here: 5; Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?', 26.

<sup>264</sup> Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?', 26; Fremeaux and Albertazzi, 'Discursive strategies around "Community"', 150, 151; Brenno, 'La diversità ci unisce', 2.

<sup>265</sup> Brenno, 'Voglia di Europa', 2.

leviathan, an injustice to a community of Peoples. The attributes that the author described here, speak in favor of a strong local and at the same time European identity, and the combination was evidently essential to a Europe of Peoples. Additionally, the reference to an *ecumene* describes that part of the earth that is habitable to humans, but is generally used in a religious sense, to describe the community of followers of a faith. The argument reiterates the salvationist message of a free Padania. In addition, it speaks volumes on the vision Lega and Quaderni Padani by extension held on community and Europe. Both should be more than a territory, they should represent a view of the past and a bright future for all its members. Nevertheless, northern Italians refused to buy into a Padanian identity that was based on a past which, in the words of Albertazzi, was ‘quite irrelevant to the self-understanding of northern Italians.’<sup>266</sup>

Besides the various ancestors, several individuals served as heroes. Albertazzi argues that within Lega’s Padanian identity they functioned to embody certain values and beliefs of all Padanians.<sup>267</sup> In the previous chapter, Da Giussano was described as the central protagonist and this remained so throughout the 1990s. Various Quaderni Padani articles nevertheless added several heroes to Lega’s pantheon. In a 1997 review of the movie *Braveheart*, the reviewer and active member of Lega, Leonardo Facco, stated that the fight of Wallace’s Scots against the English was also a battle for freedom. Wallace was a symbol of the struggle Padania goes through to achieve freedom. More than that, Albertazzi, and Cento Bull and Gilbert confirm that references to *Braveheart* were part of Lega’s public repertoire in the latter half of the 1990s.<sup>268</sup> Another Padanian hero and liberator was Hannibal. Editor of Quaderni Padani Carlo Stagnaro and the unknown author Marco Signori argued in two Quaderni Padani articles that he united many Padanian tribes and after numerous battles against the Romans, Padania was temporarily free. Hannibal, therefore, stands for Padanian unity and how, when fighting alongside each other, Padanians would be free.<sup>269</sup> Interestingly, none of the heroes above were originally from ‘Padania’, yet they were turned into symbolic Padanians. Wallace was a Padanian in spirit while Hannibal was a bridgebuilder uniting the Padanians against Rome.

There however were several heroes whose birthing ground was closer to home. In a 2000 article, the unknown Quaderni Padani author Ottone Gerboli described how Branda Lucioni tore down the tree of freedom during the French occupation, reanimating the Milanese to rise up against the occupation. Gerboli described Lucioni as a perfect product of Mitteleuropean culture: born in Bohemia,

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<sup>266</sup> Albertazzi, “‘Back to our roots’ or self-confessed manipulation?”, 35.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibidem*, 31.

<sup>268</sup> Leonardo Facco, ‘Videoteca Padana L’indipendenza in poltrona’, *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:11, 54; Albertazzi, “‘Back to our roots’ or self-confessed manipulation?”, 37; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 137. For Facco’s position as active member of Lega see No author, ‘2 novembre 1997 - Tutti i nomi degli eletti al Parlamento della Padania’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 23.

<sup>269</sup> Carlo Stagnaro, ‘Annibale, eroe Padano’, *Quaderni Padani* (1997), 3:12, 19-23; Marco Signori, ‘Annibale il liberatore’, *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:24, 4-31. For Stagnaro’s position as editor see for example the colophon of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> edition of *Quaderni Padani*. No author, ‘Redazione’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:18, 2; No author, ‘Redazione’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:30, 2.



he lived and fought in Padania and Austria.<sup>270</sup> According to Gerboli, his path was ‘a kind of thread that binds [...] the various parts of the solid Padanian patchwork.’<sup>271</sup> Lucioni supposedly was a symbol of successful unity through diversity and had to show that Padania was part of *Mittel-Europa* – a Europe of Peoples.<sup>272</sup> Another hero was Giuseppe Mayno. Mariella Pintus – with whom no active connection with Lega was found, but whose work Huysseune considers party literature – in a 1998 *Quaderni Padani* article described how Mayno revolted against the French, acted like Robin Hood, and was a patriot fighting for the independence of his land.<sup>273</sup> Within Lega’s discourse, Lucioni and Mayno symbolized unity and the will towards independence and freedom. These various historical figures sacrificed themselves for the community and embody the virtues of freedom and independence. More than that, according to Zúquete they embody a complete commitment to the Padanian nation. In that sense, these heroes were an example to contemporary Padanians.<sup>274</sup>

### *Freedom for the promised land*

References to the Padanian forefathers were not just made to attribute characteristics modern Padanians inherited, but also to put specific values on a pedestal, most of all freedom. Aldo Moltifiori – former mayor of Monza, member of Lega and quoted in a *Quaderni Padani* article by Fossati – for example referred to the Longobard ancestors ‘to whom we owe the inextinguishable yearning for Freedom’.<sup>275</sup> The reference to Freedom with a capital letter and the multiple references to freedom described above gives meaning to an issue of the highest importance, similar to god written with a capital G. Freedom becomes something that is beyond the here and now, beyond this world – an inalienable right that existed outside the sphere of politics or the state, something religious. In a 2000 *Quaderni Padani* article the unknown author Christian Merlo argued that only by the support of an extraordinary religious cult – it may be argued that this was Lega – freedom could be achieved.<sup>276</sup> The hints to freedom were persistent, for example in reference to the Battle of Canne (216. B.C.) when the Celts fought together with Hannibal. The unknown *Quaderni Padani* author Leonardo Puelli wrote in 1999: ‘Canne was the last utopia that an army made up of free men and led by a brilliant man attempted to achieve in ancient times’.<sup>277</sup> Although *free* is not written with a capital letter, the reference to *utopia* makes clear that freedom of an idealized society, a promised land, was in fact exactly that which Padanians had to strive towards. By generating the myth that this promised land had existed once before, *Quaderni Padani* and

<sup>270</sup> Ottone Gerboli, ‘Branda Lucioni, un eroe padano’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:29, 38-40, here: 39.

<sup>271</sup> Gerboli, ‘Branda Lucioni, un eroe padano’, 40.

<sup>272</sup> For *Mittel-Europa* see Alberto Lembo, ‘Mittleuropa e Padania’, *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:21, 3-8. For the symbol of Mittel-Europa see Gilberto Oneto, ‘L’aquila d’Europa’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:31, 20-28.

<sup>273</sup> Mariella Pintus, ‘Mayno della Spinetta, brigante alessandrino, imperatore della Frasca’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:18, 57-59; Huysseune, ‘Landscapes as a symbol of nationhood’, 360.

<sup>274</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 187.

<sup>275</sup> Fossati, ‘Alcuni interessanti aspetti di Stato e Legge Longobarda. Le scelte degli avi ci influenzano tuttora e sono modello di autodeterminazione’, 17. Capital letter F in ‘Freedom’ in original. For Aldo Moltifiori see No author, ‘È morto Aldo Moltifiori: fu il primo sindaco leghista di Monza, il cordoglio di Comune e colleghi di partito’, *Il Cittadino* <<https://www.ilcittadinomb.it/news/cronaca/e-morto-aldo-moltifiori-fu-il-primo-sindaco-leghista-di-monza-il-cordoglio-di-comune-e-collegli-di-partito/>> [accessed 14 June 2022].

<sup>276</sup> Christian Merlo, ‘L’essenza del meridionalismo’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:27, 19-25, here: 21.

<sup>277</sup> Leonardo Puelli, ‘Canne: fra storia e mistificazioni’, *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:21, 33-36, here 36.

Lega by extension aimed to convince its supporters to strive towards recreating this utopia. This was not just a place but according to a 2000 Quaderni Padani article by Oneto also ‘how we were’.<sup>278</sup> Padania was this promised land, as Oneto plainly stated in a late 1998 Quaderni Padani editorial.

[Padania] is a nation that has been erased from visible history for many centuries by the same Roman enemy, it is a nation that is rediscovering its identity today and wants freedom and independence, it is a community that rediscovers its culture and tongue. Like Israel, it has a very strong bond with the land that dates back to the dawn of the world: *this is our promised land*, the land that has always been inhabited by our Celtic and Ligurian ancestors, the land that Alboino admired from the mountain King (or Matajur) one spring day in 568, just as Moses had looked at the land of Canaan from the slopes of Mount Abarim.<sup>279</sup>

Oneto equated Padanians with the Jews, a people recognized for their suffering and determination towards realizing the land promised to them by Yahweh. In a similar tone, the author compared Alboino with Moses – both kings of their people – and the mountain Matajur with Mount Abarim – from which both respective kings looked upon their promised land, Padania and Israel. Regarding this promised land, one author on Jewish history, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, states: ‘This saga of Jewish aspiration for a homeland reveals the utopian aspects of the nation’s yearning. Through four millennia, Jewry was guided by the belief that it was possible to create God’s kingdom on earth.’<sup>280</sup> Analogous to the Jewish belief in a kingdom of God on earth – Israel – Oneto viewed Padania as a holy kingdom on earth, born from an aspiration that guided Padanians for generations. This also clarifies that Padanians as a whole were supposedly chosen to achieve this goal – similar to the Jewish people. In their unity lay the key to a free and prosperous nation.

The use of Judaism was not just a theme in Quaderni Padani but also part of Lega’s discourse. When Lega’s leadership was being prosecuted during the secessionist period and a search was conducted in the party headquarters and the houses of militants, a comparison with Judaism was drawn. During a speech in March 1998 Bossi argued that ‘[a]s did the Jews against their persecutors [,] we must not forget any crime perpetrated against the Padanian patriots.’<sup>281</sup> The comparison between the Jews and the Padanians was made to exemplify the great injustice directed towards the chosen people and to argue that the threat the Padanians faced was as grave as the threats the Jews encountered. In the aforementioned 1998 article, Oneto followed the same logic when he compared the defenders of Cordelia (Aosta, Salassians – the Padanian forefathers) to those who defended Masada (Jews) against the Romans. Both supposedly committed suicide when defeat by the Romans seemed certain. Oneto’s description is one of heroism in which the defenders of Cordelia chose ‘to collectively kill themselves,

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<sup>278</sup> Gilberto Oneto, ‘Fra il sole e la luna: sacralità della Padania’, *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:30, 42-45, here: 42; Huyseune, ‘Landscapes as a symbol of nationhood’, 356. See also Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 100, 101.

<sup>279</sup> Brenno, ‘Cordelia non cadrà un’altra volta’, *Quaderni Padani* (1998), 4:20, 1-2, here: 1, 2. Italics by me, SE.

<sup>280</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism: History, Belief and Practice* (New York, Abingdon; 2003), 434.

<sup>281</sup> Umberto Bossi, ‘Intervento del Segretario Federale, on. Umberto Bossi. Sabato 28 marzo 1998’,

<[https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/Presidente\\_Federale/discorsi\\_assemblee/1998\\_28marzomilano.pdf](https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/ilmovimento/Presidente_Federale/discorsi_assemblee/1998_28marzomilano.pdf)> [accessed 18 March 2021], 1-13, here: 6. See also Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 120.

rather than surrender to the Romans.<sup>282</sup> In their unity, they, both Salassians and Jews, died for the cause of freedom – confirming their position as a chosen people. As Masada became a symbol of the Jewish struggle against oppression – Cohn-Sherbok argues – so Oneto contends ‘Cordelia is the symbol of our millennial desire for freedom and autonomy but it is also the sign of our newfound unity and determination.’<sup>283</sup> From the overall comparison with Judaism, Lega considered Padania as the promised land and the Padanians as the chosen people.

Furthermore, the reference to a promised land is distinguishable in other political religions and indicates an important role for the movement’s leader, as political scientist Hans Maier argues: ‘The eternal darkness from which the enemy has emerged and into which it will be flung back is countered by those calling for the bright future of the loyal and righteous, who, under the leadership of the “good shepherd” [...] move step by step towards paradise.’<sup>284</sup> A strong case is thus made for Bossi, who as the ‘good shepherd’ had an essential role within Lega. Cento Bull and Gilbert contend that institutionally Bossi took center stage. Zúquete, Albertazzi and McDonnell, and Callegaro add that by expelling anyone that defied him, Bossi built up Lega’s inner circle with confidants, strengthening his position.<sup>285</sup> More than that, Roberto Maroni, a high-ranking member of Lega Nord and quoted by Zúquete, portrayed Bossi as a ‘sort of Hindu Holy man’ who had rare qualities (clairvoyance, intuition, of the people), making him a perfect leader.<sup>286</sup> Zúquete describes how Bossi himself argued that he made great personal sacrifices for the cause of freedom – a martyr – and he termed his own origin story as releasing ‘the apostle in me.’<sup>287</sup> In short, according to Zúquete, and Albertazzi and McDonnell, Bossi was presented as a prophet and savior who would lead his people to the promised land.<sup>288</sup>

There are some descriptions in Quaderni Padani of what the promised land was. A 2000 article by Oneto stated that it was ‘[a] mysterious and fascinating valley [...] which in the golden age was a tangle of inland waters [...] and forests of oaks, lindens and elms. A green carpet from which small patches of cultivated land emerged, where the fog was the ghost of the ancient sea that even before had covered the plain.’<sup>289</sup> According to various Quaderni Padani articles, written by Pintus (2000) and Oneto (1996), an important symbol of the land was the river Po. It represented history, traditions, the heart of Padania and its people. Pintus stated: ‘woods and meadows, roaring streams, high mountains, gentle

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<sup>282</sup> Brenno, ‘Cordelia non cadrà un’altra volta’, 2.

<sup>283</sup> Brenno, ‘Cordelia non cadrà un’altra volta’, 2. See also Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism: History, Belief and Practice*, 112.

<sup>284</sup> Hans Maier, ‘Political Religion: a Concept and its Limitations’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (2007) 8:1, 5-16, here: 6.

<sup>285</sup> Public excommunication was a tool frequently used by the party leadership and there is a long list of those who were removed and branded as traitor because they opposed Bossi, thwarting his position as Lega’s undisputed leader. Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 156, 209; Albertazzi and McDonnell, ‘The Lega Nord in the second Berlusconi government’, 960; Callegaro, *Nationalism in contemporary Italian Politics*, 7; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 123.

<sup>286</sup> Giovanna Pajetta, ‘Come la vedo io, di Roberto Maroni’, *Il grande camaleonte* (Milano, 1994), 144, quoted in Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 142; Ibidem, 142-144.

<sup>287</sup> Umberto Bossi and Daniele Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione*, (Milano, 1993), 87, quoted in Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 147; Ibidem, 146, 147, 153.

<sup>288</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 204; Albertazzi and McDonnell, ‘The Lega Nord in the second Berlusconi government’, 961. See also Albertazzi and McDonnell, ‘Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre’, 5-7; McDonnell, ‘A weekend in Padania’, 128; Agnew and Shin, ‘Spatializing Populism’, 917; Maier, ‘Political Religion: a Concept and its Limitations’, 13.

<sup>289</sup> Oneto, ‘Fra il sole e la luna: sacralità della Padania’, 43.

lakes and great rivers that can be summed up in one name: the father Po, son of Monviso.<sup>290</sup> Oneto described the river as a source of life, of memory, of identity and of unity. Additionally, he argued that it calls its people to defend autonomy and freedom.<sup>291</sup> The Po is supposedly at the center of Padania and this symbol was used regularly by Lega, for example in the ceremony of the water. The river's source is located in the Alps and this is another important symbol of the land. The Alps were described by Oneto as a place of refuge for Padanians and their freedoms.<sup>292</sup> This means that, according to Oneto, '[o]ur people took refuge in the Alps and preserved their identity and from there they repopulated the plains and cities each time [it was] devastated by invasions, genocides, famines and epidemics.'<sup>293</sup> The Alps, therefore, functioned in a fashion similar to the Arc of Noah. According to Oneto and Corti it was a demographic and ethnic (Celtic) tank, a place of raw material, a space where values were maintained, a beacon of hope, culture and identity and opposed to the city and valley which according to Grisolia were places of moral and social degradation.<sup>294</sup> The mountains were the communities, which Oneto described as temples: '[t]oday, when someone tries once again to destroy our freedoms and our dreams, we must "go back to the Alps" of our Small Homelands, of our profound identities, of our feeling [of being] part of the Padanian Community.'<sup>295</sup> In that sense, Huisseune argues that the Alps were a symbol of the rootedness of the Padanian nation and the nation's authenticity.<sup>296</sup> More than that, based on the sources shown above, I argue that the river Po and the Alps are both the physical and metaphysical representations of a promised land. Inherently, the meaning assigned to the Alps and the river Po was political. As objects, they created a physical differentiation from the rest of Italy.

The argument has now come full circle. Lega claimed that Padania was a land that could only exist through freedom, a land promised to Padanians who were aware of their glorious past and their Celtic character. According to active member of Lega and *Quaderni Padani* author Antonio Zòffili, Padanians had to reconquer the territory and mark it with the fruit of their free Padanian institutions. In the end, it was not just land, but the soul that made Padania:

Traditions, ethnic groups, language, religion, the course of rivers and the direction of the mountains and hills are not enough: only a large gathering of men, healthy in spirit and generous of heart, can create that moral conscience which is called PADANIA. Padania is a soul, a spiritual principle: it is the common possession of a rich heritage of traditions, combined with the desire to live together, to continue to assert the received inheritance. Padania is the point of arrival of a long past of exertion, of sacrifices and dedication: it is loved in proportion to the sacrifices made and the evils suffered together, just like the house that was built and left to the children....<sup>297</sup>

<sup>290</sup> Mariella Pintus, 'Le Alpi come fonte di simboli e miti', *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:28, 45-48, here: 45.

<sup>291</sup> Gilberto Oneto, 'Il Po è un drago', *Quaderni Padani* (1996), 2:6, 1-5, here: 1, 3-5.

<sup>292</sup> Gilberto Oneto, 'Le nostre radici sono nelle Alpi', *Quaderni Padani* (2000), 6:28, 54-55, here: 54.

<sup>293</sup> Oneto, 'Le nostre radici sono nelle Alpi', 55.

<sup>294</sup> Oneto, 'Le nostre radici sono nelle Alpi', 55; Michele Corti, 'Riflessioni sulla matrice alpina dell'identità etnica lombarda', *Quaderni Padani* (1995), 1:1, 8-16, here: 12, 15; Grisolia, 'Proposte per uno statuto etnonazionalista padano', 42. See also Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?', 26; Huisseune, 'Landscapes as a symbol of nationhood', 358, 362.

<sup>295</sup> Oneto, 'Le nostre radici sono nelle Alpi', 55.

<sup>296</sup> Huisseune, 'Landscapes as a symbol of nationhood', 354, 355.

<sup>297</sup> Antonio Zòffili, 'Saggio sulle costituzioni padane', *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:25/26, 23-28, here: 28. For Zòffili's position as active member of Lega see No author, '2 novembre 1997 - Tutti i nomi degli eletti al Parlamento della Padania', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 23.

What becomes clear from this section is that from 1995 onwards Lega tried to give Padania a historical background which had to make clear to its followers that both the people and the land had an age-old right to exist. In the process, various Quaderni Padani authors and Lega's leadership did not shun from making comparisons with existing religions to legitimate their view.

### *Ceremony and ritual*

Developing a shared ancestry, heroes and a sacred land was not the only way in which Lega aimed to legitimate its nation-making project. This also transpired through ceremony and ritual. Besides Pontida – as argued in the previous chapter – Venice was an important site. The Cronistoria described and Cento Bull and Gilbert confirm that at Venice in September 1996 the Ceremony of the Water was carried out and in which, according to Lega, 4 million people participated. Bossi filled an ampoule with water at the source of the river Po in the Alps (see *Image 3*) and carried it all the way to Venice where he poured it into the Venetian Lagoon.<sup>298</sup> There Bossi pronounced a Declaration of Independence.<sup>299</sup> In his speech, quoted in the Cronistoria, he spoke of the land upon and rivers around which the Padanian ancestors lived, the bond between the different peoples, and through this the natural community that existed, based on the shared values, history and 'homogenous social,



*Image 3: Bossi at the source of the river Po, 1996.*

moral and economic conditions.<sup>300</sup> According to Bossi the establishment of a free nation-state was therefore the logical conclusion: 'Padania is our pride, our great resource and our only chance to freely express ourselves in the fullness of our individual natures and our collective feeling.'<sup>301</sup> Lastly, Bossi – and according to the Cronistoria, with him all the peoples from Padania – declared Padania a sovereign, independent, federal republic. The Cronistoria described how the declaration was complemented by the presentation of a flag (*il Sole delle Alpi*), anthem (*Va Pensiero* by Verdi), a charter of the rights of the citizens and the creation of a symbolic Padanian National guard (*I Camicie Verdi*).<sup>302</sup>

<sup>298</sup> For image 1 see No author, 'Lega, la marcia del Po vent' anni dopo', La Repubblica (16 Settembre 2016) <[https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/09/16/foto/lega\\_la\\_marcia\\_del\\_po\\_vent\\_anni\\_dopo-147903794/1/](https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/09/16/foto/lega_la_marcia_del_po_vent_anni_dopo-147903794/1/)> [accessed 16 November 2021].

<sup>299</sup> According to Cento Bull and Gilbert rather 400 to 700.000 people attended this ceremony. No author, '13/14/15 settembre 1996 – Nasce Ufficialmente La "Padania"', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 12-16, here: 12; Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 111.

<sup>300</sup> No author, '13/14/15 settembre 1996 – Nasce Ufficialmente La "Padania"', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 12-17, here: 12, 13.

<sup>301</sup> No author, '13/14/15 settembre 1996 – Nasce Ufficialmente La "Padania"', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 12-17, here: 13.

<sup>302</sup> No author, '13/14/15 settembre 1996 – Nasce Ufficialmente La "Padania"', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 12-17, here: 14-16. See also Giordano, 'Italian regionalism or "Padanian" nationalism', 466, 467.

Zúquete argues that the event was described by Lega as a sacred moment, and Maggi in a 1996 Quaderni Padani article termed it a procession. From then on, the event was repeated yearly. The water was poured and Bossi gave a speech that according to Zúquete was equal to Pontida, as it served its role as a ritual to confirm the sacred mission – the freedom for Padania.<sup>303</sup> Some political scientists also interpret the event religiously. Zúquete for one portrays the taking of water from the source of the river as the start of a pilgrimage and the pouring of the water into the lagoon of Venice as “an act of purification” that was meant to ‘symbolize the birth of Padania’.<sup>304</sup> Albertazzi for another describes the rituals that lead to the declaration as symbolizing ‘the necessary process of regeneration that Padanians needed to undertake in order to start their new life and take control of their promised land.’<sup>305</sup> Words like ‘procession’, ‘pilgrimage’, ‘purification’, and ‘regeneration’ describe the religious nature of this event, which was highly liturgical, dressed in ritual, symbols and history, and that had to speak to the imagination of those attending. Mosse makes clear that processions – similar to the one leading up to the declaration at Venice – have always been part of national festivals, and ‘these grew increasingly formalized as part of a liturgical whole’.<sup>306</sup> Additionally, he describes that festivals like this had to draw people together for a common purpose, an ideal. At Venice, this ideal was the freedom for Padania and it was concretized (‘made operative’ in Mosse’s words) and visualized through the pouring of the water.<sup>307</sup> Yet, it is difficult to ascertain if Venice itself – like Pontida – became a sacred space, meaning that it remains unclear how well-defined and set apart the area was from its surroundings. In that sense, it was different from Pontida, where the ceremony was performed on a well-defined grassland.

Combined with other regular events, the meetings at Pontida and Venice aimed to instill the idea of Padania within the minds of its followers. According to Zúquete, this meant that the events had to consolidate an alternative world by sacralizing ideas and turning them into sacred truths. Simultaneously the meetings had to strengthen a sense of belonging, group solidarity, commitment to the mission – the freedom for Padania – and, as Te Velde suggests with regards to early twentieth-century socialist mass meetings, the conversion of new members.<sup>308</sup> Equally, regarding Nazi mass meetings, Mosse argues that participation in them aimed to create a community of faith.<sup>309</sup> Similarly, Zúquete claims that those attending and actively participating in Lega’s liturgical events supposedly transcended the here and now, and became part of a collective whole.<sup>310</sup> Moreover, Mosse contends that when regularly practiced, these liturgies became magical rites in which the participants believed, and

<sup>303</sup> Maggi, ‘Anche i Celti possono aiutarci ad ottenere l’indipendenza’, 20; Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 163.

<sup>304</sup> Ibidem, 162. Ruzza and Fella also argue it was a pilgrimage, see Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 66.

<sup>305</sup> Albertazzi, “‘Back to our roots’ or self-confessed manipulation?”, 31.

<sup>306</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 85.

<sup>307</sup> Ibidem, 7, 45.

<sup>308</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 159, 164, 166, 171, 172, 188; Te Velde, ‘The Religious side of Democracy: Early Socialism, Twenty-first century Populism and the Sacralization of Politics’, 40.

<sup>309</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 115, 194, 205. See also ibidem, 117, 200, 204; Te Velde, ‘The Religious side of Democracy’, 44.

<sup>310</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 217.

in time it became a reality. He terms this the ‘reality’ of the magic.<sup>311</sup> He also argues that the symbolic content, ‘the ritual expression of a shared worship [...] was crucial to [the participants’] sense of belonging.’<sup>312</sup> Equally, Te Velde describes that within socialism, the ‘atmosphere’ of mass meetings was essential in the conversion, as transformations took place during these meetings.<sup>313</sup> Additionally, Augusteijn and others in the ‘Concluding Remarks’ of *Political Religion Beyond Totalitarianism* argue that through ‘political rituals, liturgy, celebration of a shared past and the veneration of charismatic leaders’, the hearts and minds of those participating were won, meaning: ‘[t]he religious imagery and discourse in these types of political manifestations are capable of deeply affecting people and transforming their identities.’<sup>314</sup> The interpretations by Mosse, Te Velde, and Augusteijn aim to demonstrate the effectiveness and importance of liturgical events on the participants’ lives, and – as Zúquete contends – it could be argued that the events at Pontida and Venice had a similar impact on Lega’s followers.

Accepting for a moment this premise of effectiveness, once converted, then according to Zúquete the believers were drawn into a world in which they supposedly had knowledge that was suppressed by the Italian state. The conspiracy, described before, made it essential to create one’s own flow of information that was free from (Italian) censorship and that aimed to reach millions of Padanians.<sup>315</sup> The Cronistoria described that starting from the Declaration of Independence, Lega therefore further developed its own media, voluntary organizations and institutions, ranging from a newspaper, *La Padania* (1997), which according to Eva circulated almost exclusively among Lega members, giving substance to the isolation of the movement; a radio station, *Radio Padania Libera* (1997); a Padanian television channel, *Telepadania* (1998); to a Padanian school (1998) where among other things local languages and history were taught. Furthermore, from 1998 onwards a *Miss Padania*, a *Miss Sole delle Alpi* and a *Miss Camicia Verde* were elected – which according to Woods had to amplify the Padanian look; a *Made in Padania*-trademark was launched (1998) and several Padanian associations were created, among them the *Movimento Giovani Padania*, Young Padanian Movement; *Padaniambiente* (1998), an ecological movement for the preservation of the Padanian environment; and *L’Associazione Alpini Padani* (1999), the Padanian Alpine Association, with as its goal according to the Cronistoria ‘to protect and restore the [...] history and tradition of the Alpine Corps.’<sup>316</sup> According

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<sup>311</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 15. See also Renato Moro, ‘George L. Mosse, Historian of Modern Irrationalism’, *George L. Mosse Program in History* (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996) < <https://mosseprogram.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/188/2017/05/1996-Moro-George-L-Mosse-1.pdf> > [accessed 14 December 2021], 1-12, here: 4, 5.

<sup>312</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 207.

<sup>313</sup> Te Velde, ‘The Religious side of Democracy’, 40, 41.

<sup>314</sup> Augusteijn, Dassen and Janse, ‘Concluding Remarks’, 259.

<sup>315</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 214.

<sup>316</sup> No author, ‘7 Febbraio 1999: Nasce L’associazione Alpini Padani’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Quarta Parte 1999*, 6. For the sources on the institutions and other organizations, see: No author, ‘8 gennaio 1997 - Esce il 1° Numero De “La Padania”’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 17; No author, ‘17 maggio 1997 - Radio Padania Libera’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 19; No author, ‘1998 - Telepadania Si E’ Accesa’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 34; No author, ‘21 settembre 1998 - Via Alla Scuola Padana’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 34; No author, ‘3 aprile 1998 - Elezione Miss Padania’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 29, 30; No author, ‘24 novembre 1998: Nasce “Made In Padania Coop”’,

to McDonnell and political scientist Davide Vampa, these organizations were unsuccessful, except for the youth organization.<sup>317</sup>

Zúquete suggests that it can be argued that these media outlets and associations further developed the alternate worldview of a unique and homogeneous community, united in their view of society, past and future. Additionally, Hood, Hill and Spilka contend that in general there exists a reciprocal relationship between religion and group unity, based on which it can be argued that the members' faith in Lega's worldview and their sense of mission in turn strengthened their group bond.<sup>318</sup> Expressed through its mass meetings, media outlets and organizational network, Lega aimed to further strengthen this religious sentiment. Yet, as Zúquete explains, in entering into this alternative world, Lega and their supporters found themselves in an increasingly polarizing relationship with the rest of society. This in turn strengthened their belief (while becoming more and more expensive) in belonging to a sacred community, committed to the mission of freeing Padania.<sup>319</sup>

Some doubt about this view must however be expressed. Sociologist Elisa Bellè argues and substantiates – through interviews and by attending meetings of a local Lega branch – that militants identified only weakly ‘with the central leadership and its symbolic and rhetorical repertoires’.<sup>320</sup> There was in her words, only ‘a “weak” ideological dimension’.<sup>321</sup> Rather, Bellè found that *conviviality* was central in the everyday life of the party branch, even during important political events and was ‘the main expression of political identity’.<sup>322</sup> Sharing food and drinking together played a central role in this conviviality.<sup>323</sup> In an earlier unpublished version of her article, Bellè even argued that conviviality was of greater importance to the militants' collective identity than either ‘the content of the demonstration, or the presence of important party leaders’.<sup>324</sup> Although researched in the early 2010s, her analysis nuances the reach of conversion, the followers' dedication to the sacred mission (by ‘constant ritualization’), and even the transcending moment that Zúquete or Te Velde describe as essential for the theories of apocalyptic millenarian Salvationism and political religion respectively.<sup>325</sup> Zúquete admits this to a certain extent, arguing that the meetings at Pontida and Venice were festival-like, ‘with a playful dimension constituted by organized games and musical events’.<sup>326</sup> A point supported by Celiksu,

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*Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 35; No author, ‘19 dicembre 1998: Arriva “Padaniambiente”’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 36; Eva, ‘The Unlikely Independence of Northern Italy’, 12; Woods, ‘The Many Faces of Populism in Italy’, 38.

<sup>317</sup> McDonnell and Vampa, ‘The Italian Lega Nord’, 113.

<sup>318</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 165, 218; Hood, Hill and Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion*, 19.

<sup>319</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 219, 220.

<sup>320</sup> Elisa Bellè, ‘From Territory to Community. Inside the “black box” of the Lega Nord’s populism’, *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa* (2015), 1, 89-109, here: 94.

<sup>321</sup> Bellè, ‘From Territory to Community. Inside the “black box” of the Lega Nord’s populism’, 94.

<sup>322</sup> Bellè, ‘From Territory to Community’, 95. See also *ibidem*, 94.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibidem*, 95.

<sup>324</sup> Elisa Bellè, ‘Inside the “black box” of the Northern League’s communitarian populism. Ethnography of two local party branches’, *Panel Ethnography of populist movements* (unpublished), 1-16, here: 6.

<sup>325</sup> For ‘constant ritualization’, see Zúquete’s definition on missionary politics in the introduction. Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 31, 32, 171, 172, 217; Te Velde, ‘The Religious side of Democracy’, 40-42.

<sup>326</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 164.



who stated that ‘this independence movement did not look like violent examples from different parts of the world, and the *giuramento* (oath-taking) ceremony looked less like a revolution and more like a town festival at which people enjoyed in the early-spring weather.’<sup>327</sup> Yet Zúquete does not associate this with a limited reach of his theory.

Mosse’s work supports Belle’s argument. He wrote on the development of sharpshooting festivals in early nineteenth-century Germany. Originally militia that worked to remove the French occupation, these groups later turned into sharpshooting associations that organized festivals, combined with religious processions. There were various societies that in 1862 formed a national society that organized national and regional festivals. Mosse argues that these festivals became ever more formalized, yet there was no total unity as ‘the frivolity and enjoyment, officially deprecated, were nevertheless present. [...] personal amusement was still an important reason for attendance. Beer flowed freely and the site was often surrounded by stalls offering food, drink, and games.’<sup>328</sup> The argument speaks mainly for the limitations that secularized liturgy faced in the past and that can equally be found in the description of the meetings at Pontida and Venice. On the other hand, and in another, more metropole branch, Bellè found that militancy was based on ‘absolute dedication and loyalty to the cause’, and hierarchical, while at the same time comradeship was stressed.<sup>329</sup> In the latter case, the argument follows to a far larger extent the requirement of dedication that Zúquete writes on. Hence, the local situation is far more complex than the argument Zúquete offers. He leaves out agency, that Lega’s militants either in smaller groups and/or as individuals had.

One reason for the limited reach of these events can be found in their liturgical rituals which were very recent artificial creations, not built on any pre-existing tradition. During the 1980s and early 1990s, Lega could still claim it was restoring a recently lost past that people knew or heard of. But, by taking the road towards a more ancient past, it overstretched what the militants could relate to. The myth of Padania was not yet internalized, and Mosse argues with regards to Germany during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century, that ‘[t]he traditional world of myth and symbol cannot be manipulated except with great care, for it involves the ways in which men objectify their world.’<sup>330</sup> This point strongly correlates with Smith’s view that argues that for these narratives and images to be successful they needed to ‘strike a chord’ with the people.<sup>331</sup> Mosse exemplifies his argument with the unsuccessful national liturgy of the German Second Empire during the top-down organized Sedan Tag.<sup>332</sup> Something similar happened with the events at Pontida and Venice, where the myth of Padania was to be objectified through liturgy. Lega’s liturgy came top-down and did not originate organically

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<sup>327</sup> Celiksu, *The making of the Padanian Nation*, 56. Italics in original.

<sup>328</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 151.

<sup>329</sup> Bellè, ‘From Territory to Community’, 102.

<sup>330</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 195.

<sup>331</sup> Smith, *Nationalism: theory, ideology, history*, 89, 126, 127, 137, 138.

<sup>332</sup> The Sedan Tag was a top-down liturgical festival commemorating the German victory over France. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 90, 91.

from the people, even if Bossi was praised for being one of the people. The liturgy therefore only grabbed the imagination of a select group of Lega's voters. Meaning, those members who were already highly involved in the party, the militants. Celiksu and Albertazzi even contend that the majority of northern Italians never took the idea of Padania or the contiguous identity seriously, because there was no territorial or symbolic coherence in Northern Italy.<sup>333</sup> Albertazzi explains that Lega's identity lacked legitimacy, exactly by debating that the party attempted to construct it top-down.<sup>334</sup> Next to that Lega's secessionist stance did not produce a desire for independence among northern Italians. Albertazzi and McDonnell show that its number even dwindled during the secessionist period and it left Lega in a far corner of the political stage with 'increasingly folkloristic attempts to attract attention through the creation of *Padania*'.<sup>335</sup>

By extension, a similar point of contention is that on *faith*. Bossi described 'the faith of Pontida' as a faith striving for freedom, without which 'Padania cannot appear.'<sup>336</sup> According to Zúquete, it was faith that set the militants – a vanguard, aware of the dangers Padania faced and protecting their history, culture and values, a chosen people and preachers for Padania – apart from ordinary people.<sup>337</sup> The militants were one of two ranks within the party who had proven their dedication and they had to maintain their zealotry to keep their position. Members could thus penetrate deeper into the political party's hierarchy only by actively engaging in it. At the same time, becoming a militant meant being introduced to Lega's ideals and faith.<sup>338</sup> According to Zúquete, the militants were therefore integrated into the alternative world created by Lega. This supposedly meant that they thought they were a community of true believers with faith in the mission – a free Padania – and its leader – Bossi – who, according to one high-ranking Lega member quoted by Zúquete, fought in a 'saintly battle' to free the north from the yoke of Roman enslavement.<sup>339</sup> Only with a free Padania could 'a moral community of the faithful and saved', as Zúquete termed it, come into existence.<sup>340</sup> Additionally, the *Cronistoria* and a 1999 *Quaderni Padani* article by Oneto showed that a strong salvationist and universalist message was part of Lega's discourse in which a free Padania was also essential for world peace and prosperity.<sup>341</sup>

A direct link with faith must be drawn with Maier's description of Maoism. 'Outsiders must have been reminded of scenes from religious life – of the processes of admission into the community of believers, of catechism and tests of faith, initiation into the mysteries of the church – but also of the

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<sup>333</sup> Celiksu, *The making of the Padanian Nation*, 57; Albertazzi, "'Back to our roots" or self-confessed manipulation?', 21.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibidem*, 35.

<sup>335</sup> Albertazzi and McDonnell, 'Separati in Casa?', 3. Italics in original. The authors argue that in 1996 19.3% of northern Italians were in favor of northern independence, a year later this was just 13.7%. See *ibidem*, 7.

<sup>336</sup> '1994 Lega di Lotta e di Governo', *La Padania*, (1 May 2003) and 'Intervento del Segretario Federale Umberto Bossi', (7 September 1998), quoted in Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 168.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibidem*, 118, 168, 171, 172, 179, 189, 190.

<sup>338</sup> Cento Bull and Gilbert, *The Lega Nord*, 12, 13, 123, 124; Celiksu, *The making of the Padanian Nation*, 68; Ruzza and Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right*, 75. For more background see Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni, 'Introduction', in: Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni (ed.), *Understanding Populist party Organisation: The Radical Right in Western Europe*, (London, 2016), 1-18, here: 5, 6.

<sup>339</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 118, 119, 166, 170.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibidem*, 200.

<sup>341</sup> No author, '13/14/15 settembre 1996 – Nasce Ufficialmente La "Padania"', *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Terza Parte 1996-1998*, 12-17, here: 13; Gilberto Oneto, 'L'estinzione dei Padani', *Quaderni Padani* (1999), 5:24, 34-39, here: 39.

exclusion of unrepentant church members and the excommunication of renegades and heretics.<sup>342</sup> These believers displayed a kind of religious enthusiasm and extreme loyalty and obedience, ready to suffer to fulfill the mission.<sup>343</sup> As argued above, in Lega this was present only within a small group of militants. Even so and paraphrasing Zúquete, their sense of mission supposedly joined them together and converted them into a virtuous community. Mosse describes how, with regard to Nazism, it was believed that the goal of freedom could only be achieved through activism – overthrowing evil – by a similar vanguard.<sup>344</sup> Lega’s representation of this faith can be found in the Oath of Pontida, during which the party’s new representatives stated, as quoted in the *Cronistoria*, that they would be faithful to Lega and dedicate their lives ‘for my people, [...] for the Federal Republic of the North.’<sup>345</sup> Furthermore, Giordano quotes an activist who describes following Lega as a religion, a feeling from within, whose mission was to save Northern Italy.<sup>346</sup> Zúquete in addition offers several examples of men and women in the inner circle whose devotion and dedication was evident, but most of them were already part of Lega’s leadership and therefore seem to have used the same rhetoric as their leader.<sup>347</sup>

Contrary to this interpretation, when looking at the example by Bellè it can safely be argued that this top-down view by both Lega’s leadership and Zúquete of Lega’s hard-core supporters as overzealous, hardened fighters, does not reflect the findings from other sources. It rather expressed hope for complete dedication which did not transpire in vast numbers. Rather, Giordano contends, the majority of Lega’s voters disappeared during the secessionist period.<sup>348</sup> This counter-argument is strengthened by Oneto who in a 1998 editorial argued that the militants were tired (*stanchezza*), because they did not see results.<sup>349</sup> Again, in a 2000 *La Padania* article Oneto, quoted by Zúquete, stated that Lega ‘needs [...] obedient people’ and ‘our militants must [...] convince, convert and create consensus.’<sup>350</sup> The words ‘needs’ and ‘must’, argue that this was not yet the case, but that it had to be so. These articles show no complete devotion to or certitude of the sacred mission, but rather express hesitance about the course Lega set upon and there was knowledge about the lack of this devotion at the party leadership. In summation, Lega aimed to construct a discourse on Padania, but when it came to ritualistic events, like those at Pontida and Venice, they were unable to convince the majority of Lega’s activists of its purpose.

The sources presented above demonstrate that from 1995 to 2001 Lega intended to involve itself further in the lives of its followers and become a political religion. Yet, the sacralization of politics became an end in itself as Lega pronounced the birth of a new nation. In doing so and by moving away from policies that had any concrete meaning to the majority of its constituency, by referring to an

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<sup>342</sup> Maier, ‘Political Religion’, 6.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibidem*, 13.

<sup>344</sup> Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 169; Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 198.

<sup>345</sup> No author, ‘Maggio 1992: Giuramento di Pontida’, *Cronistoria della Lega Nord. Dalle origini ad oggi. Seconda Parte 1988-1995*, 12.

<sup>346</sup> Giordano, ‘A Place Called Padania?’, 219.

<sup>347</sup> See for example Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 169, 170.

<sup>348</sup> Giordano, ‘The continuing transformation’, 218, 219.

<sup>349</sup> Brenno, ‘Padania: è solo l’inizio Riflessioni sul momento politico della Lega e del Movimento indipendentista’, 3.

<sup>350</sup> Gilberto Oneto, ‘Le due anime del Movimento,’ *La Padania*, (9 January 2000), quoted in Zúquete, *Missionary politics in contemporary Europe*, 171. Italics by me, SE.

ancient past to which most supporters could not relate, and by creating liturgical events which most followers did not take seriously, Lega lost its role in Italian politics and its ability to speak to its constituency.

## *Conclusion*

This thesis examined to what extent Lega turned itself and its creation of the Padanian nation into a political religion between 1989 and 2001. It researched how Lega Nord and the nation it created aimed to involve itself in all aspects of its followers' lives, and present them with a sense of community and purpose. The story Lega told, the symbols, myths and liturgy it used played an essential part in the development of this political religion. It is this story, these symbols and the liturgy that form the core of this thesis.

To research these various aspects, this thesis employed two sources: the *Cronistoria* and the *Quaderni Padani*. As argued in the introduction, they must be viewed as part of Lega's discourse. The *Cronistoria* functioned as a chronological overview for the developments of and within the party and by using the *Cronistoria* this thesis added a time-oriented component to the existing academic literature. In addition, the events and speeches within the *Cronistoria* were viewed as a source that functioned to describe Lega's liturgical events and their content. From 1995 onwards, the other source – *Quaderni Padani* – played a major role in giving Lega's political and economic views a stronger background and presented more refined and elaborate arguments to Lega's standpoints. Additionally, the various authors delved extensively into the Padanian nation by presenting and developing various enemies, heroes, forefathers, symbols, myths and values.

From 1989 to 1995 Lega Lombarda and later Lega Nord presented policies that focused on the protection of the Lombard/northern Italian territory, privatization, tax cuts and immigration control, to a northern electorate who saw their society crumble under a changing economy, state intervention and immigration. The productive north was juxtaposed with the clientelistic center and south, and Lega presented a pro-business program, called for the protection of Lombardy's people and culture and argued that Lombardy – and later all of northern Italy – should be given more autonomy. During the same period and where the Christian Democrats (DC) had left off, Lega started to represent the values of the constituency in the Third Italy, with a focus on community, kinship, trust, a 'Calvinist' work-ethic, a spirit of sacrifice and a Catholic morality, to name a few. It was during the late 1980s and early 1990s that the party turned these values into ethnic markers. Lega used these to claim that northern Italians were historically, culturally and traditionally separated from the rest of Italy. This 'ethnicity' provided Lega with a basis to justify its main political claim, the autonomy of the north. Within this context, the party presented a federal state as the solution to the problems of the north and the *Cronistoria* described how as a result on 16 June 1991 Bossi symbolically proclaimed the Republic of the North.

The literature and sources presented in the first chapter demonstrate that between 1989 and 1995, Lega Lombarda – and later Lega Nord – wanted to involve itself in the lives of its followers, but involvement was limited. It sacralized its politics by building upon the already existing values and interests in Lombardy and gave it a historical background, to create a Northern community and a sense

of purpose, meaning: to strive towards autonomy within a federalist state. In that sense, Gentile's definition of civil religion helps to understand the development of Lega Nord in this first period. He argues that states adopted myths, rituals and symbols to confer a sacred aura on their political institutions. Although Gentile refers to states, his argument maintains its use when referring to political parties. In the case of Lega, the most obvious examples of myths and symbols can be found in the descriptions of its enemies – who had supposedly suppressed northern development and identity through time, such as the central Italian state, Barbarossa, the south and immigrants – and the centrality of the people of the North – symbolized through the ancient Lega Lombarda and Da Giussano, who acted as one of the earliest symbols of the party and who symbolized the strength and courage the members had to emulate in the present. In that regard, the Battle of Legnano acted as an analogy for the contemporary struggle the north faced in fighting centralism.

Simultaneously Lega created several rituals, with the events at Pontida as its most obvious example. There the members swore an oath to the party and towards realizing the goal of autonomy. The oath also functioned as a parallel for the struggle of the ancient Lega Lombarda and the modern Lega, and inherently aimed to demonstrate the continuity of the North over the ages. Essential during the Pontida meetings were also the speeches by Lega's leader Umberto Bossi. During these meetings, he presented the path forward and his speeches supposedly became expressions of the shared faith in the mission. Simultaneously, Pontida itself became a sacred space filled with symbolic activities – distinguishing it from its surroundings – as well as a space that brought Lega's followers together. The events at Pontida display how Lega wanted its supporters to view them – as an organization that existed through time – as well as what Lega expected of its followers – to be dedicated to the party. Pontida thus had an essential role in the legitimation of Lega's discourse of the North, and the Oath of Pontida and Pontida itself were powerful tools in the sacralization of the party and this Northern entity.

There are however some limitations to this sacralization. Lega focused mainly on economic and political change rather than building an alternative world that had to encompass all aspects of its followers' lives. More than that, Lega wanted the North of Italy to gain autonomy, but within the context of being Italian. It was within this framework that Lega grasped the voters and therefore the sacralization of politics was a means to an end. This is why during the 1989-1995 period Lega's attempt to involve itself in the lives of its followers was limited and thus stopped short of becoming a political religion. The sacralization of Lega's politics mainly existed to give legitimacy to its political project. Within this context, Lega's star rose, was it not for Berlusconi's Forza Italia arrival on the political stage in early 1994, which took the spotlight away from Bossi. After a short period in government, Lega found itself pressed into a corner and chose an extreme tactic in which many supporters would initially follow the party in 1995/1996, but its fortunes would change.

From 1995 onwards, Lega moved towards secessionism. The party's focus shifted from clear policies for its northern constituency to placing the nation-making project at the center of its program. The

literature and sources presented in the second chapter show that from 1995 to 2001 Lega Nord demonstrated that it wanted to involve itself further in the lives of its followers. Gentile's definition of political religion helps to understand the development of Lega Nord in this second period. He argues that during the twentieth-century political movements claimed to determine the meaning and ultimate purpose of existence by distinguishing between people who followed good and those who followed evil. Although Lega nor the nation it created held any actual power, nor was there any will to act and kill millions of people – as Gentile argued – it did distinguish between good and evil and presented its followers with an ultimate purpose: freedom for Padania.

In practice, trying to involve itself further in the lives of its followers meant that Lega created its own institutions, delved deeper into a northern 'history', myths and symbols, created more associations, its own flow of information, and finally developed more liturgical events. In short, Lega aimed to create an alternative world that had to encompass all aspects of its followers' lives.

Accordingly, Lega took concrete steps towards the creation of its own – ultimately symbolic – institutions. First of all, in May 1995 the party established the *Parlamento del Nord*, to decide on – among other things – the kind of federalism Lega wanted. By the end of that year and although still floating between federalism and secessionism, Bossi presented the Italian government with an ultimatum: to choose federalism or be responsible for Lega's move towards secession. Even so, it was not until the successful outcome of the 1996 elections – gaining 10% of the overall votes – that Lega felt strengthened and explicitly moved towards secessionism. On 4 May 1996, Bossi proposed that an independent northern state, Padania, should be created, with its own parliament and government, and in September 1996 at Venice he symbolically declared independence. It soon became clear that the parliament was indistinguishable from the party that created it. At its core, Lega's steps towards constructing a parliament and government, however symbolic, marked the will towards involving itself further than before in the lives of its followers.

Additionally, the existing symbols, myths and liturgy were further developed and became central to Lega's discourse. Where before 1995 the enemies were oppressing the north and its identity, by 1995 Lega's discourse displayed the party's enemies as working together through a centuries-long play to destroy Padania. Quaderni Padani was an important driver of this view and, together with Lega, they fabricated several scapegoats – Romans, Freemasons, globalization, liberal capitalism and Islam, to name a few – who worked together to destroy the rich, authentic and ethnic Padanian communities. Within Lega's discourse, the conspiratorial enemies represented the forces of evil, and they had to be combatted so that in the end good would prevail.

Padania was developed in opposition to these enemies and Lega's discourse, therefore, delved further into a Padanian story and who Padanians were. At its core, Lega argued that Padania existed of many different communities that lived together and when necessary fought a common enemy in the pursuit of freedom. Within this setting, various Quaderni Padani authors were at the forefront of constructing an all-encompassing Padanian past. They developed new forefathers and deepened the

existing ones. Celts, Longobards and Ligurians supposedly contributed physical aspects and characteristics to the modern Padanians, with as central features intolerance towards oppression, a sense of community and a desire for autonomy. The Celts above all functioned as the glue holding the Padanians together and they were supposedly at the center of a Padanian church – which was simultaneously an effort to show Lega’s Christian character. Various Quaderni Padani authors make clear that these forefathers and Padanian heroes such as William Wallace, Hannibal, Branda Lucioni and Giuseppe Mayno embodied specific values, especially freedom. Within Lega’s discourse, this was seen as an inalienable right and related to a utopia, a free society, a promised land and a chosen people. Against this background, references to Judaism abound, both among the party’s political leadership and in Gilberto Oneto’s Quaderni Padani articles. They functioned to give credibility to the idea of Padania as a promised land and Padanians as a chosen people. Additionally, descriptions by Quaderni Padani authors clarify that the physical and metaphysical representations of the promised land were the river Po and the Alps, with the former as Padania’s source of life and the latter functioning as the Arc of Noah. Overall, the forefathers and the land had to bestow onto Padania a historical background and legitimate the nation’s existence through time to Lega’s followers. Albertazzi however already showed that this past was considered to be ‘quite irrelevant to the self-understanding of northern Italians’ and it suggests that most supporters could thus not relate to this past.<sup>351</sup>

Another aspect to consider are the events at Venice. Organized from 1996 onwards, Bossi used the first meeting as a stage to symbolically pronounce independence. The expressions used to describe the event demonstrate how both Lega at the time and political scientists later on considered it a highly liturgical, religious happening. Additionally, it can be argued that together with Pontida, the events at Venice were the main events for its supporters. Zúquete suggests that they had an important role in consolidating the alternative world Lega aimed to create, strengthen belonging, group solidarity and commitment to the mission. Zúquete however only researches the hard-core supporters and not the general voter. This thesis argued that this does not do justice to the overall experience of most supporters. Referring to Bellè who found that *conviviality* – through the act of sharing food and drinking together – was at the center of some militants’ experiences rather than the content of demonstrations, nuances the reach of the consolidation of the alternative world. More than that, and as Albertazzi and Celiksu explain, it is conceivable that most militants did not understand what Lega’s top-down discourse set out to do, lacking in coherence and legitimacy. Lega’s discourse was therefore unsuccessful as the narratives and images of Padania failed to – quoting Smith – ‘strike a chord’ with the people.<sup>352</sup>

In addition, this thesis questioned Zúquete’s view in which the militants supposedly thought they were a community of true believers with faith in the mission and its leader. Evidence by Bellè and various articles by Oneto show that complete dedication did not transpire in vast numbers. Rather Oneto

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<sup>351</sup> Albertazzi, ““Back to our roots” or self-confessed manipulation?”, 35

<sup>352</sup> Smith, *Nationalism: theory, ideology, history*, 89.



showed that the militants were tired and he argued that militants had to convince, convert and create consensus, but that this was not the case. The huge amount and variety of institutions Lega established during the 1995-1999 period is another example of the attempt to legitimize the Padanian nation and create a sense of community, but overall, these were unsuccessful.

On the whole, from 1995 to 2001 Lega tried building an alternative world that had to encompass all aspects of its followers' lives. As such, and to a far greater extent than before 1995, the party thus tried to turn itself and the Padanian nation into a political religion. During this period the sacralization of politics became an end in itself, rather than a tool to legitimate its political project. In this context and through its anti-all stance, Lega lost a large part of its constituency consisting of Christians, business owners and overall, its more moderate electorate. In the end therefore, the party's discourse didn't speak to the values or history northern Italians knew anything about, and Lega's secessionist policies and identity did neither address the needs nor the interests of most northern Italians. Lega realized that its path proved unsuccessful. The pro-Christian move of the late 1990s showed that if Lega wanted to maintain any foothold in the north, it could not isolate itself. Devolution had the same goal. Although not immediately successful, this less extreme view, gave Bossi a seat at the table and eventually a position within the second Berlusconi administration.

Overall, this thesis aimed to contribute to the debate on the sacralization of politics. Lega's example shows that this sacralization, when taken to the extreme, was not always successful and the result could even backfire. Examining political movements such as Lega through the lens of the sacralization of politics can thus contribute to a better understanding of their success or failure. Additionally, this thesis demonstrated that it is important to look beyond a movement's hard-core supporters as Zúquete did, and include the general voter. More than that, analyzing subjects through the lens of the sacralization of politics can add to the scholar's toolbox of researching political movements, beyond frequently used interpretations such as populism, subculture or ethno-regionalism/-nationalism. It might for example contribute to a better grasp on the recent development of political parties and movements typically described as populist, such as Trump in the United States of America, Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy) in the Netherlands or Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star movement) in Italy. This provides an arena for further research.

## *Literature*

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