

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE  
Department of Political and Social Sciences

**POLITICS OF IDENTITY**  
**THE MOBILIZING DYNAMICS OF TERRITORIAL POLITICS IN**  
**MODERN ITALIAN SOCIETY**

by  
Oliver Schmidtke

Thesis submitted for assessment with  
a view to obtaining the Degree of Doctor of the  
European University Institute

Florence, January 1995

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

At the close of the twentieth century, we are witnessing a seemingly paradoxical situation: Processes of globalization and standardization of socio-cultural environments are accompanied by the reemerging political significance of ethnic and territorial identities. Macrosocial change has induced cultural modernization rooted in the trans-nationalization of the media and patterns of consumption, the fragmentation of lifestyles and the consequent emergence of a 'market of identities'. Rather than obstructing the formation of identity-based political projects, geo-political and social changes have contributed to a new quest for unquestionable notions of belonging. Collective identities, once firmly delineated by established class cleavages and integrated social milieus, are now contested. In this context, the construction of images of communal belonging is a response to the accelerated dissolution of stable structures of social integration and political cleavages in contemporary society. A strong notion of boundaries and related processes of social in- and exclusion promise an indisputable frame of reference in a world in a state of accelerated change.

In political terms, concerns for individual and collective identity have heavily impacted on the formation of collective action. Identity itself has become a crucial focus of political struggle. Beyond the traditional class based lines of political conflict, the focus on 'identity' has been effective and empowering when identity politics has been constructed as the active affirmation of politically marginalized groups (feminists, communitarians, nationalist and regionalist movements). Conflicts have become prominent in various cultural fields dealing with issues like self-expression, equality, participation and quality of life (Betz 1992). In particular, the spatial reference, whether at a local or a regional level, has gained new salience in politics (Dahrendorf 1992). Throughout Europe ascriptive categories of belonging to a community have again become a reference point of political mobilization.

The advent of new lines of political conflict built around identity concerns are an expression of the radical challenges to existing democratic institutions and cultures from different political forces. Various political aspirations point to the exhaustion of the integrative capacities of existing political settings, with their institutionalized interest cleavages and dependance on a primordially sanctioned community of the nation. In particular, political projects based on a strong notion of collective identity have come to challenge dominant forms of political representation. What is at stake is a redefinition of the notion of citizenship revising those criteria of collective belonging on the basis of which the individual develops

a sense of political rights and social entitlement as a feeling of commitment vis-à-vis the political community into which she or he is integrated.

Against this background, territorial politics cannot simply be equated with the revived attempt to preserve features of ethnic uniqueness of a social group. To adequately understand the rejuvenated reference to the small ethnic or territorial unit, one has to see that it has its roots in distinctive political processes. In this context, the often cited distinction between ethno-territorial principles of citizenship and civil-political ones is debatable. In its modern version, territorial movements call into question the nation-state as a mode of organizing modern political reality. The critical discussion of citizenship and the state is at the core of their discourse. The theoretical argument is that we are faced with a new phenomenon of territorial politics: decoupled from birth and blood-rooted ties of belonging, symbolically mediated features of belonging have proven to be a successful rhetoric strategy in fabricating consensus for broader political movements. Not the defense of the rights of a narrowly defined ethnic community, but broader political issues are often linked to the notion of strong communal belonging. Along these lines, cultural notions of group identity turn out to be an effective vehicle for identity and consensus construction on which political action can be based. The formulation of a territorially framed collective identity provides critical ideational resources by which processes of social exclusion can be rationalized and related interests redefined.

Protest in the name of small territorial entities claims that the nation state center as the location of political power has no longer the charismatic attraction it once had. Nation-state agencies and their main representatives, established political elites are increasingly portrayed as lacking the ability to adequately represent the citizens' interests. In contrast, the periphery is described as the new renovating principle in politics. The widespread critique of the 'political class', and the claim of smaller territorial and social units to be the only authentic representative of the citizens, resonates well in this situation. Territorial politics have become a main point of reference in opposing national political regimes whose legitimacy is seriously challenged.

One of the most dramatic such cases in Western Europe in this respect is without doubt the Italian nation-state, and the astonishing rise of the Lega Lombarda/ Lega Nord<sup>1</sup> under its charismatic leader Umberto Bossi. In a political system which normally experiences only marginal shifts in electoral behavior, the Lega succeeded over a ten year period to establish itself as a major force in Italian politics. With its impressive mobilization of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Lega has become a critical determinant within a political system which faces a severe legitimation crisis.

How can one make sense of such a political movement that at the close of the twentieth century makes ascriptive 'ethnically' and territorially framed categories of belonging the very basis of political mobilization in Western Europe? How is it possible that in a highly modern world increasingly characterized by culturally standardized lifeworld experiences and processes of individualization, the supposedly "premodern" sense of belonging to a territorially defined community gains this enormous political influence? What is the rationale behind the desire for territorial belonging and what kind of political meaning is assigned to it? What are the roots of success of this new political agent and by which dynamic has it become a driving force in the 'revolutionary' changes in Italian politics?

In tackling these questions it is vital to understand the novel nature of cleavages along which new interests are expressed and politicized. Regionalist - or, as I shall argue more accurately - 'territorial' political approaches have rarely been identified as a genuine source of political conflict in contemporary society. Until very recently the assumption has been dominant that, though being relevant to some historically unique regions, territorially based conflicts were on the verge of being resolved in late twentieth century society. This type of political unrest has often been seen as a generational question: a younger generation, less rooted in the indigenous culture and less committed to tradition would replace those for whom the fight for the territory's cultural and political self-determination used to be politically decisive. From a mainstream perspective ethnicity, and in a wider sense, the principle of territoriality as the basis for political identity have been normatively perceived as irrational phenomena of transition, alien to the very logic of societal modernization.

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<sup>1</sup> After the first electoral successes of the Lega Lombarda the Lega Nord was founded in 1987. This organization comprises the Liga Veneta, Piemont Autonomista, l'Union Ligure, Lega Emiliano-Romagnola, the Alleanza Toscana and the Lega Lombarda itself. In the following I uniformly refer to this organization as 'Lega'.

It is against this background that political commentators and academics have had difficulties coming to terms with the Lega as a new phenomenon in Italian politics. One can not account for the astonishing success of the Lega, simply by drawing parallels with the salience of established regionalist aspirations in Europe. The concrete character of this political mobilization largely remained beyond the reach of those who sought to categorize the Lega under labels such as 'regionalism' or 'protest vote'. The tendency amongst academic commentators to characterize the Lega on the basis of prefabricated labels indicate that the applied interpretative tools were inadequate to come to terms with the new type of territorial movement. The main difficulty was, in this context, to explain a form of collective action which by far exceeds the form of political mobilization traditionally generated by regionalist movements.

The distinctive character of the case of the Northern League is striking. A territorially defined collective identity became a feature of identification and an object of political aspirations in a region with no regionalist political history. There simply was no long-lasting fight for self-determination centered on appeals to historically authentic symbols and forms of collective identity. Regionalism has not shaped the history of the region nor has it been an important part of the national political culture. The reference to the region Lombardy (as to the other northern regions) is, although being legitimated by an eternal notion of common descent and tradition, in fact a recently invented image. Lombardy lacked a specific regional identification until the mid eighties, and only recently cultivated its present identity through broad political mobilization. In essence, the Lega Lombarda manufactured what Anderson has termed as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) but has done this in a remarkably short period of a decade, without the support of a truly different language or of a distinguished political tradition. In addition, the Lega Lombarda has contributed to strengthen other regional leagues that were previously declining, such as the Veneto League, and start new ones, all then converging in a large Northern League. In the rapidity of this creation which was supported by the extensive utilization of media-conscious political spectacles and rapidly manufactured symbolism, lie political and cultural dynamics that differentiates the Lega from traditional regionalist movements.

Another surprising character of the Lega is the dynamic of its political mobilization. Starting off as a political actor referring to a genuine ethno-regional approach, the Lega quickly established itself as a political force beyond a constitutive reference to a geographically defined regional entity. With its first notable success this new agent in Italian

politics redefined the territorial reference in its collective identity in terms of a northern community, ultimately operating virtually on a national level in its mobilizing efforts. What hence is to be explained is the qualitative change from a regionalist movement primarily in Lombardy and Veneto, to a force within national government and with explicit national aspirations.

This new salience of territorial identity demands an intensified theoretical reflection on the formation and dynamics of the 'politics of identity'. The core idea of the book is that we need a theory of collective action appropriate to conceptualize territorial movements as macro actors from an action-theoretical perspective. How is the reference to a territorially defined community rendered meaningful, and what are the patterns of political mobilization generated on these grounds? The aim will be to conceptualize those cognitive and affective processes by which in a particular socio-cultural field territorial boundaries are constructed and conflictualized. In contrast, the literature on social movements has the tendency to stress the inner dynamic and organizational resources in the formation of collective action. Applying this research account, the particular dynamic in a cultural field largely remains beyond the scope of most research.

By the same token, some major theoretical and methodological biases in mainstream scholarship on nationalism and regionalism tend to obstruct a fruitful analytical approach to this form of collective action. Territorial movements as macro actors have rarely been made the subject of systematic empirical research. Being predominantly explained with reference to broad structural changes in society, the concrete formation of political action and its reproduction in a specific socio-cultural context remains beyond the analytical scope of dominant approaches. What is hence needed is a systematic account of patterns of political mobilization which allows a coherent explanation of political change on a macrosocial level. Claiming that neither the analytical focus on broad social structural change nor the micro-sociological account of individual actors and organizational resources can accurately explain patterns of political mobilization, an analytical model for research will be developed. Those socio-cultural processes shall be given central importance by which a collective actor is formed and consensus for political mobilization is fabricated. In an action-theoretical perspective, the analytical focal point will be on the concrete processes on how a territorial defined collective identity is generated and made the basis for political mobilization. The 'construction of identity' will be conceptualized as a dynamic process which is shaped by the

'political opportunity structures' reacting to which forms of collective identities are conflictualized.

In this, the image of collective identity is taken as the critical medium for the pre-political formation of consensus and as a structuring feature in political mobilization. On the basis of images of collective identity shared beliefs are formulated, interests are re-defined and the notion of a coherent political actor is fostered. Research on collective action abstractly acknowledges the emergence of a collective identity an ideological component in regionalist or nationalist forms of protest. However, mostly it has been treated as a side-effect of political mobilization, disregarding its constitutive meaning in political conflict. Rarely, collective identity has been conceptualized in a way appropriate for systematic empirical investigation. The role of collective identity in political mobilization is abstractly recognized but not treated analytically.

In confronting this theoretically inaccurate conceptualization, my guiding thesis is that the basic codes through which forms of collective identity are constituted, structure the pattern of political mobilization. By the very nature of the criteria and procedures by which the boundaries of the assigned community are reproduced, the range and quality of the feasible collective action are set. In this respect the concept of collective identity shall be introduced as a structuring principle of macrosocial change. On the basis of a typology of notions of collective identity the respective dynamic of political mobilization will become comprehensible. It is on this basis that analytical insight into the different forms of territorial politics in our cases is provided. The Lega's specific mode of constructing its collective identity has enabled it to generate a form of political mobilization which is simply not feasible for traditional forms of regionalism.

The structure of my investigation is designed firstly to generate an interpretative frame for territorial politics, appropriate to explain its new salience and different characters. The analytical tools are developed accordingly and are systematically applied in my case studies. Here it is worth pointing out that my empirical analysis in the case of the Lega and the one in South Tyrol are not equivalent. As the 'shadow case study', the South Tyrolian case is looked at in a less systematic way. It is meant to shed light on the particularities of the new and productive form of territorial politics we find in Northern Italy. In this context it is worth emphasizing that both cases are located in the same national context. This means that, regarding their external environment, they react to the same challenges and opportunities.

Thus, an intra-national comparative perspective has many advantages over the comparison of cases situated in different national political systems.

The study is organized into three main parts: The first part is a thematic introduction to the role of territorial politics in modern society and its reemerging political salience. Territorial politics is discussed here against the background of the contested claims of the traditional nation-state and the challenge set by the agenda of decentralization. The basic assumption will be that territorial politics and the recourse to features of communal belonging cannot be portrayed as pre-modern phenomena whose societal basis has disappeared in the contemporary society. No longer simply being defined by birth and descent, territorially framed forms of collective identity have become problematic and subject to an intensified discourse on recognition and on the contested validity of their constituting boundaries (Calhoun 1994).

In this context, the third chapter seeks to situate my investigation of new forms of territorial politics in an interpretative framework identifying in them a distinctly modern and highly virulent political agenda. This part of the work interprets modern territorial movements as actors which raise genuinely political concerns centered around concerns for political representation and a revitalized debate on the notion of citizenship. It is against this background that the rise of populist forces is described as a phenomenon not specific to Italy, but as part of the reemergence of territorially based forms of opposition against the political elite in Western society. Particular attention is given to what I shall label 'communitarian populism'. This political agenda effectively combines a territorially based identity as the integrating feature of collective action with discontent with the national political establishment.

The second part of this thesis investigates the methodological and theoretical issues from which the work's analytical model for territorial movements shall be developed. Chapter four and five serve to present the basic conceptual framework for the subsequent empirical analysis. Dominant approaches to nationalism, ethnicity and regionalism are discussed, analyzing their respective methodological and theoretical points of departure (Chapter IV). Elucidating some major shortcomings of key concepts and related research agendas to be found in dominant scholarship in this field, the basis for a more appropriate research design is provided. The socio-cultural field in which processes of political mobilization originate shall be advanced as a critical point of departure in investigating territorial politics. The analytical focal point of my research design shall be based on the mediating processes between the

symbolic construction of collective identity ('meso' level) and the 'political opportunities' (Tarrow) and constraints on political mobilization to be found on the macro level. Demarcating it from an individual-based microsocial approach as well as from research operating with broad macro-structural variables, concrete interaction processes are taken as the critical explanatory variable in order to come to terms with forms of identity-based collective action.

In a second step, Chapter V seeks to clarify the application of analytical tools from research on social movements to the field of territorial politics. Here, the aim is to develop a research agenda and key analytical concepts which are able to constructively meet the shortcomings in previous research in this field. At this point the concept of collective identity is theoretically developed and delineated in its critical role of shaping the lines of the political conflict generated on its cognitive grounds. For purposes of empirical research a typology of images of collective identity is developed, distinct through their integrating codes and patterns of consensus formation. On the basis of this ideal-type distinction, the analysis of the Italian cases will focus on the notion of collective identity as the structuring principle for political mobilization.

Before entering into the case studies a brief account is given of the national political environment in which the *Lega* and the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* conduct their mobilization (Chapter VI). Particular attention is paid to the political opportunities resulting from a political system increasingly subject to profound crisis. This chapter is not meant to give a full account of Italian politics in the 1980s and 1990s but is designed to illuminate those features which are particularly related to the rise of the *Lega*. The guiding thesis is that these 'political opportunities' critically impact on the formation of collective identity as they are in turn essentially shaped by the struggle for the recognition of identity. In the third part the case studies (Chapter VII and VIII) are designed to give a detailed analysis of the formation and reproduction of collective action which evolves on the basis of a particular collective identity.

In the concluding chapter the cases are compared. The specificity of both forms of political mobilization, their respective scope and dynamic shall be explained, referring to the ideal-type classification of forms of collective identity. On the basis of these findings, I will discuss the particular strength of a form of 'reflexive territorialism' as represented by the *Lega*<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> All the citations taken from non-English sources, have been translated by the author.

## Chapter II

### General Points of Departure: Territorial Politics in Modern Society

#### 2.1. Introduction

When Walker Connor at the end of the 'sixties' spoke of a worldwide trend towards the disintegration of the nation-state and the rise of ethnic minority movements as relevant political forces, his idea was heavily opposed by the mainstream of scholarship of that time (Connor 1967). Not only more than a quarter of a century ago the dominant opinion was that nationalist or regionalist sentiments would necessarily wither away in the course of the modernization process. Based on K. Deutsch's concept of nationalism as a modern, communicative societal unity, regionalistic particularities were - and still are - seen as transitory phenomena in an irresistible process of modernization. Hence, integration and assimilation into a national entity and the inescapable abandonment of distinct regional lifestyles were explained as unavoidable accompaniments of modern society. Regionalism in this context came to be seen as a romantic anachronism and an obstacle to further necessary modernization<sup>1</sup>. Territorial determinants were no longer seen as crucial components of political action in modern society. Politically, these aspirations were judged as irrational attempts to undermine the very principle of modern society.

Commenting the rise of new regionalist movements in the 1970s, Jean Améry concluded that there is no rationality behind the claims of these political forces at all and that regionalism can hence be seen as a 'regressive ideology of intellectuals' (Améry 1977)<sup>2</sup>. He argued that in modern times regional demands for cultural and political self-determination are created artificially since in most cases they strive for political solutions realizable only in a few, exceptional cases. The main point in his argument is that because there is supposedly a structural lack of material and socio-political opportunities, regionalist movements either remain a cultural expression of marginalized intellectuals or they strive for an unattractive, narrow-minded and probably isolated and xenophobic community<sup>3</sup>. In accordance with this

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Etzioni sees the retention of regionalist claims as a fallback to out-dated values and threat to the efficiency of national economies, see: (Etzioni 1983).

<sup>2</sup> See along the same lines, the Dudeck's interpretation (1985); he puts emphasis on the politically regressive elements inherently alive in a critique of civilization formulated on territorial or regionalist grounds.

<sup>3</sup> See for a differentiation between 'authentic' nationalist movements and those supposedly artificially created: Bahn (1987).

interpretation, by their emphasis on ethnic roots regionalist political force are often labeled as regressive (Alexander 1992).

However, is the underlying theoretical reference point of such a critique - a supposed incompatibility of territorial politics<sup>4</sup> with the structures of highly modern society - accurately taken? To what extent would it be justified to speak of an anti-modern phenomenon, a romantic reaction to the dominant features of modern society regarding regionalist protest? Some authors in fact interpret it along these lines. Referring to Weber's perception of modernity according to which its two main characteristics can be identified as differentiation and rationalization, regionalism could be described as forces working against the logic of modern society. Of particular significance is in this respect the particular form of political legitimation. Modernity, in one of its crucial features, has been characterized in terms of the advent of a form of citizenship which makes social solidarity and political community increasingly less dependent upon the actual position in different social spheres. Framed as a 'revolt against modernity', territorially based autonomist movements against the nation-state could hence be perceived as a form of 'dedifferentiation' and reenchantment that is periodically formed as a counterprocess against and hence an integral part of the dynamic of modernity (Tiryakian 1992).

Implicitly accepting the main assumptions of this argument, regionalism was grasped by others as an accurate response to the destructive dynamic of the modernization process. With its new salience in the course of the late 1960s from the left as well as from the right regionalism was seen as an appealing vehicle for their respective political protest. For some regionalism was equated normatively with a 'subversive' force within the nation-state aiming at securing diversity and democracy. For example, in the late 1970s Fetscher suggested that regionalist and subnational movements can be considered as the expression of a revolt against the ubiquitous tendency in capitalist societies to standardize the lifeworld in accordance with the needs of commodity production (Fetscher 1980)<sup>5</sup>. The political process of preserving the cultural peculiarity of a region was interpreted as a resistance against the inherent logic of the capitalist mode of production to assimilate economically and culturally social environments.

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<sup>4</sup> In using the term 'territorial politics' I allude to collective actors which are based on the legitimating recourse to a spatial reference as the cornerstone of their political identity. The notion of territorial politics is thus employed regardless of the specific boundaries marking the spatial entity and the seize of the territorially defined community, which in this context means that regionalism and nationalism fall under this category.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding these early attempts to make regionalism interesting to the left in Germany see: Kursbuch (1975), particularly Gustafsson (1976). From an orthodox leftist point of view see the 'classical' work of Lafont (1971).

Regionalism, to enlarge upon this theme, was meant to give a new home to the young baker from the *mezzogiorno* whom Pasolini described as alienated, rootless, and physically sad in a society dominated by the embracing mechanism of culturally standardized mass consumption (Pasolini 1979)<sup>6</sup>. The quest for regional identity is perceived here, representing the opposing force against this trend, as the longing for an integrated life and, subsequently, as a potentially revolutionary protest against capitalist society.

In this context, territorial politics is employed as a vehicle for broader political aspirations. To put it into a more general frame formulated in contradiction to the modernization theory: regionalism is seen by some as a form of protest in which ethnic symbols articulate a conflict at the core of modern society. As S. Berger puts it: "Ethnic symbols are means of expressing a revolt against loss of power and against the impersonality and homogeneity of advanced industrial society." (Berger 1977:177) Far from being a romantic longing for a traditional and integrated society of the past, regionalist claims are interpreted here as a form of political unrest which addresses the constitutive logic of the reproductive process upon which modern capitalist societies are based.

From the opposite political viewpoint Hermann Lübbe explicates regionalism as a cultural and political reaction against a specific challenge of modern civilization. According to his portrait of modernity, rapid social change has shaken the moral and political ground on which traditional society was built. Modern civilization is for him necessarily accompanied by a loss of moral orientation when culturally peculiar regions are exposed to the homogenizing force endemic to modernity. The ongoing destruction of established highly integrated communities tends to produce a social and political *anomie*, a state of moral disorientation against which regionalist movements react with their claims<sup>7</sup>. The fact that identity is increasingly a cultural and political issue of priority indicates, according to Lübbe, that progress has reached a limit where it becomes normatively questionable. Regionalism is seen by him as a form of a *political historicism* that has its rationality in the fact that the 'unreasonable demand of emancipation' (*Emanzipationszumutung*) has become pervasive (Lübbe 1979). Apart from its narrow-minded forms regionalism indicates for him the justified revolt against emancipatory

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<sup>6</sup> See for this 'rehabilitation' of the 'province' as a lifeworld with intensive and less anonymous social relations: Gustafsson (1977a; 1977b), Kursbuch (1975), and Blaschke (1980).

<sup>7</sup> Similar to Lübbe's interpretation of a persistent need for a communal sense of belonging see: Bell (1985), Berger (1974), Mayo (1974), Eichberg (1978). The view developed here is explicitly opposed to those ideas which tend to see in regionalism a force aiming at broadening political participation.

political projects that are said to ignore the people's need to belong to a particular lifeworld and to integrate into traditional social networks.

These interpretations of regionalism are characterized by rather general assessments; by this they owe more to political projections than to a well informed insight into the actual political movement in the regions themselves. However, despite their opposing political viewpoints, the aforementioned authors implicitly agree on the point that the ongoing process of modernization and standardization of social lifeworld potentially generates unrest and political protest. The very development that sets people free from their traditional social ties, that generates the unbound and 'rootless' individual is highly likely to be accompanied by feelings such as the desire for belonging and a stable sense of communal identity. As Morin already stated in the late 1960s:

The process of centralization and modernism that produces cultural homogeneity and national political integration also produces ethnic consciousness and a growing desire for identification and membership in a community less distinct and impersonal than national society. (Morin 1967:61)<sup>8</sup>

There is a politically relevant dialectic at work in the modernizing process: although the sense of roots in indigenous culturally integrated communities is decreasingly confirmed by concrete lifeworld experience, the belonging to a territorially defined community can become decisive for people's personal and political identity under certain conditions. An accelerating rationalization gives birth to a longing for community while simultaneously demolishing those social conditions upon which such an integrated community has traditionally been based. Ideologically the appeal of an integrated society becomes pervasive regardless of - or perhaps because of - the fact that the social conditions of its realization are systematically undermined. The process of globalization has, primarily via the predominance of mass media and an international economy, decisively devitalized the tradition-based local context of the lifeworld (Giddens 1993)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Nash focuses in this context on the psychological mechanism underlying this 'dialectic of modernity': "There is an immediate appeal in the utility of the idea of primordial ties. In the modern world of rootlessness, deracination, alienation, and the twin search for meaning and a useable past, the idea of the discoverable, fixed, comfortable, and historically continuous identity is highly charged with psychic rewards and appeal." (Nash 1989:4) See also Esser (1988) who speaks in this context about the consequences of an uneven modernization.

<sup>9</sup> As McCrone puts it: "The multiplication of contacts and the constant flow of messages was steadily destroying the homogeneity of individual cultures, and the mass media and mass tourism were eroding specific territorial practices". (McCrone 1992:9-10).

It hence seems to be most appropriate to speak of an intrinsic ambiguity in the globalization process regarding the formation of territorially based collective identities (Poche 1992, Strassoldo 1992). Globalization essentially means the systematic delocalization of cultural and social concerns. Commentators have come to speak of an inevitable "eclipse of community" (Stein 1964) in the course of modernization. It can indeed be argued that the very threat that is jeopardizing the socio-cultural identity of regional communities can be identified as the source for the revival of regionalist movements. The integration of traditional ethnic communities into larger territorial and social entities, according to this interpretation, provokes the strengthening of (threatened) feelings of belonging. The reemergence of territorial politics within the nation-state is hence to be seen at the core of the modernization process transforming formerly unquestioned identities into an intensified identification and the concomitant political commitment for fighting for their survival (Nielsen 1985; Nagel 1984; Ragin 1979). It is the modernization process itself which produces attempts at negating its growing complexity and anonymity. Marquand frames this seemingly contradictory movement to be found in modernization as follows:

The age of flexible specialisation and disorganised capitalism is also the age of Samuel Beer's 'romantic revolt' and of Inglehart's 'post-materialism'- an age which, in almost all western countries, has seen a new stress on the values of authenticity, autonomy and personal fulfillment and a new revulsion against externally imposed identities of any kind. Associated with these values are a growing belief in the need for popular participation in decision making, a growing suspicion of bureaucracy and particularly remote, large-scale bureaucracy, a growing unwillingness to take traditional authority on trust and a growing yearning for the familiar, the small scale and the face-to-face in a world which seems ever more rootless, more homogenized and more impersonal. The result is challenge to established authority in the name of a new populism, a challenge to class and group loyalties in the name of a new provincialism. (Marquand 1991:36; also: Jaschke 1992)

Along these lines, Majone states that the "apparent paradox of a simultaneous movement toward integration and transnational cooperation on the one hand, and toward decentralization on the other ...." may be explained in terms of the distinction between culture and civilization." (Majone 1989) Whereas the latter notion describes the widely accepted economic and political condition of technologically advanced society, i.e., the internationalization of life in these fields, the former designates the "unique cultural heritage of each region and the claim to prevent it. Accepting the imperatives of socio-economic modernization, the indigenous cultural identity might become a reference point of new political significance. The underlying hypothesis is here that there is no principal incompatibility between the systemic structure of

modern society and a new territorially or locally conceived cultural identity<sup>10</sup>. In this respect the European Unification, though fostering processes of modernization, opens new ways to resist a further standardization and to maintain cultural diversity<sup>11</sup>.

Although correctly pointing to the specific dynamic in different fields, the suggested clear separation of political and cultural on the one hand and institutional processes on the other is debatable. Addressing the question of why territorial politics has been so successful in this context, one has to consider more closely the ideological source of attraction with which the idea of community is equipped. The notion of community provokes feelings such as solidarity and belonging. In this it is highly responsive to the needs continuously produced by modern society. This is all the more so because of the dominance of market liberalism that shaped the overall political climate in the 1980s. Social and political developments such as the dismantlement of the welfare state and the concomitant reinforcement of competitive principles have contributed to the widespread notion in which society and community are conceived of primarily as two profoundly distinct opposites. The community is correspondingly portrayed as being shaped by the opposition of internal solidarity and alienating external forces. As an ideological reference point strong territorially based collective identities become attractive to those who to a large extent feel deprived of the ability to order their lives. Referring to this crucial aspect in constructing communities,<sup>1</sup> the internal integration and the demarcation from outside, Borland (et al.) point to the defining features of the notion of community:

These two aspects of the social construction add significantly to the concretization of the imagination. The first produces a future image of the 'good society', where individual exploitation will be no more, and where individual and social interests do not clash but coincide; that is, where the good of the individual will be the common good and vice versa. Community will be a place, as it was the past and as it sometimes is in the present, which confirms the individual rather than confronting him. The second, the reminder of outside

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<sup>10</sup> For Lipp the re-articulation of tradition and regionalist identification with the local social sphere is a 'modernization on a second scale', representing a rational reaction to an anonymous economic system (Lipp 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Along these lines Mommsen speaks of the - at first sight - paradoxically co-existence of the process of supranational integration and the one of a 'substantive fragmentation' (Mommsen 1971; 1980). See for a discussion of the institutional aspect: Nye (1972).

intrusion, confirms the reality, the tangibility of community, for it contrasts what is known and experienced with what is unknown and not experienced. (Borland et al. 1992:54)<sup>12</sup>

Both the nation-state and the region as territorially defined entities build their political attraction on similar utopian energies and social-psychological processes. Regionalism, although its very essence is based on opposition to the nation-state, refers to the same legitimating resources as its attacked counterpart. In spite of marking the crisis of the nation-state, regionalist claims are organized around the same political discourse, which claims that belonging to a territorially defined community assures a better way of social integration and political representation than competing ones. Both political agendas are formulated in explicit competition to class-based approaches, emphasizing lines of political conflict beyond socio-economic or religious cleavage structures (as dividing lines within the national or regional community).

## 2.2. Sources of Attraction in Territorial Politics

Such general interpretations of macrosocial changes in the modernization process can only be a first step in coming to terms with the phenomenon of territorial politics. Working with these highly general theories of social change always means running the risk of taking sketchy generalizations as causal explanations and determining structures as such. The explanatory power that is attributed to the crucial characteristics of the modernization process, a gradual process of differentiating and rationalizing social relations, thus is rather restricted<sup>13</sup>. This holds in particular when it comes to analyze political movements that employ a strong sense of territorial belonging. Referring to broad socio-structural changes as explanatory features means disregarding the actual diversity of a social phenomenon linked to modernization in different contexts. Similarly, the general concept 'territorial politics' by does not correspond to a homogenous political form of its historic articulations. The reference

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<sup>12</sup> It may be necessary here to emphasize that this appealing notion of communality is not a political program; rather it has been used with reference to different, politically antagonistic meanings. The concrete political articulation of this 'longing for community' ranges from Bloch's notion of *Heimat* as a revolutionary principle of the left to the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a regressive ideology of national integration (See for a good discussion of the notion *Heimat* in modern society: Cremer & Klein 1990).

<sup>13</sup> For instance, for Eder a phenomenon such as differentiation is itself a social feature that has to be explained. He convincingly argues: "Differentiation is not an explanatory variable but only a descriptive category that says that there are more fields of social conflict and struggle." Eder (1992).

to a territorially defined collective identity is a decisive tool in fabricating a pre-political basis for consensus which is crucial for political mobilization. However, it determines by no means the organizational and political orientation of the particular collective actor.

In fact, territorial politics owes much of its attraction to its general programmatic openness to different political agendas. The range of political options that can be legitimized with reference to the rights of a local or regional community is virtually unrestricted. Territoriality as a political approach becomes so successful because it evokes an uncommitted notion of self-determination and solidarity as principles opposing the given social and political reality - however vague this claim may be. The general character of this protest against devaluation and foreign domination, resulting from the feeling of not being in control of one's own life, makes it difficult for the traditional national political forces to attack this agenda. This rather general image of devaluation is highly effective for territorial movements in challenging the nationally organized political elite and in becoming an important actor in contemporary politics.

However, the abstract notion of community, which is at the core of its appeal, is unavoidably furnished with concrete political goals at a certain stage of its mobilization (beyond the general claim of 'national unity' or regional autonomy). The success of territorial movements hence depends on how, in the course of their mobilization, they are able to refer to important cleavages in contemporary society and whether they convincingly incorporate these issues into their political identity. The promise that a supposedly superior community will be realized, gains its political relevance by appealingly relating its political discourse to penetrating social and political grievances. The 'political opportunities' (Tarrow) of a particular socio-political setting are hence a crucial determinant in shaping the concrete political articulation and dynamic of territorial politics.

Notwithstanding the structural programmatic openness of regionalist or nationalist claims, some key issues can be identified which are of decisive weight for their political discourse. They establish the general interpretive frame by which these actors address social reality and political matters. Pointing to these essential issues in the political discourse of territorial movements, it will become clear in which way their agenda is everything but pre-modern in character. Their principles of membership, their forms of reproduction and the related political agenda can not simply be equated with a - basically helpless - refusal of modernity. Genuine political questions are raised which relate to forms of political representations rather than simply to concerns of defending a particular social group's ethnic uniqueness. These actors

question the legitimacy of nation-state agencies confronting them with claims for a redefined basis of citizenship based upon a renewed, territorially framed notion of communal belonging. In this respect, the roots of success for territorial movements can be traced to how their argumentative patterns find resonance in the wider public. In the case studies it will be analyzed how the political movements under investigation strategically use these issues as an ideological basis for their mobilizing efforts. The following three key elements in the political discourse of regionalist movements can be identified of which the first two focus on the structural arrangement of the national state and the third directly highlights the issue of political representation: 1. The fight for regional self-determination and the opposition to the dominance of the nation-state center in politics; 2. the fight for regionally defined socio-economic entitlements in the national context; 3. the fight for the recognition of its collective identity and the related critique of the national political elite and parties.

1. The nation-state and its representatives in the center are evidently the main adversary in the mobilizing effort of regionalist movements. The national center is accused of no longer providing a credible principle in organizing societal life or a political program appropriate for adequately facing national problems<sup>14</sup>. This does not refer to particular fields of the policy process but to the entire pattern by which the national socio-political order is modeled. In this perspective, it is argued that the nation-state is neither the decisive political force to which the people feel an obligation, nor the power to which the expectations and actions of individuals are directed. The nation-state's integrative power, the idea of a community balanced by a shared collective identity superseding particularistic claims, is challenged as a solid ideational basis for political loyalty. The call for a new basis for citizenry for the political community is explicit. In this context, the smaller territorial entity - be it the region or the local realm - is presented as the renovating principle by which the malaise attributed to national society shall be cured. At the core of these claims is the affirmation of the region as the new charismatic authority in politics (Reece 1986).

To understand this central point a brief theoretical consideration is necessary. For its unhampered reproduction a social and political order relies upon a symbolic representation of its legitimacy (Lockwood, Habermas). Currently, however, the nation-states and their

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<sup>14</sup> In this regionalist movements can be taken as a confirmation of Hobsbawm's suggestion that in present-day society nationalism is "no longer a major vector of historical development" (Hobsbawm 1990:163).

national symbols, often identified with anonymous agencies and non-responsive bureaucracies, are said to lose their shaping impact on their citizens' belief system. As Sharpe puts it, the 'bedrock of the modern democratic state', namely, the underlying sense of a commonly shared identity among the population, is being jeopardized (Sharpe 1987:150). Recent political events have give substance to the idea that a culturally and socially homogenous nation-state as the basis for the modern political world has been shaken to its roots. Related to this is a significant loss of those social mechanisms that have traditionally bound the individual culturally to the nation-state as a distinct community. Processes of globalization decisively change the grounds on which the national society has been integrated and reproduced. As McCrone points out, "the simple association of the nation-state with national culture - the essence of nationalism - loosened considerably under pressure from multi-cultural and multi-ethnic forces." (McCrone 1992:2)<sup>15</sup>

Against this background, what regionalist movements claim is that the traditional nation-state is no longer the only territorially defined entity to which the loyalty of the citizens is devoted. The nation-state is portrayed as deprived of the classical characteristics which Eisenstadt describes as indispensable for the success of a modern national system: a high degree of common political and cultural identity amongst the people from different provinces, an affective integration through emotions and symbols into a national identity, and generally shared political goals for the political community<sup>16</sup>. Thus, it is not a particular national regime which is attacked by regionalist movements but the mode of organizing the basic structures of political life in the centralized nation-state.

Formulating these far-reaching claims regionalist actors react to newly emerging opportunities. In terms of their system integration, smaller territories perceive geo-political changes as supplying them with important means through which they gain broadened competence in the policy process. The scenario that underlies the argumentation of regionalist actors runs as follows: The decline in the importance of the nation-state is first of all the result of the increasing internationalization of politics and of the economy. Transnational political and economical organizations are taking over more and more of those functions originally performed and controlled by the nation-state. The gradual unification of the European Community is only the most important and visible milestone in a process which is

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<sup>15</sup> As long ago as 1978, Elias spoke of the "somewhat diluted image of the nation-state." (Elias 1978)

<sup>16</sup> See: Eisenstadt & Rokkan (1973:17ff).

draining the nation-state of its classical functions: the guarantee of security against foreign enemies, the establishment of a national economic unit, and the security of this national economy. This suggests that existing social-structural arrangements are decreasingly dependent for reproduction on the nation-state and its agencies<sup>17</sup>.

On this basis, scholars and politicians have come to recognize that the European Union is developing in the direction of a political organization with strong regional institutions, i.e., as a workable possibility for the future<sup>18</sup> ('Europe of the Regions' is an important catchphrase<sup>19</sup>). From this perspective an enforced European unification and the delegation of state functions to the regional level can be seen as complementary rather than opposing trends. Some regions - mostly as a symbolic gesture - open their own offices in Brussels, presenting themselves as independent actors on the international scene. Seen in this context European unification initiates innovative tasks for and delegates new roles to the region as it seeks to translate global decisions into concrete political settings. Likewise in other fields of policy regions have found new opportunities to articulate their interests beyond the national framework, in which they are predominantly integrated. Economically these sub-national entities play an increasingly important role in shaping the local economy, conducting cross-regional forms of cooperation and in some cases they even conduct rudimentary patterns of foreign policy (Mitchell 1994). Functionally, the nation-state is under pressure to hand over decision-making power to supranational agencies and "downwards to regional or national units seeking greater control over their own affairs." (McCrone 1992:2)<sup>20</sup>

Concerning the new opportunity structure for regions on the national and European level it is worth emphasizing that for the formation of regional self-confidence it is at this stage not decisive whether, for example, the establishment of a 'Committee of the regions' foreseen in the Maastricht Treaty, will turn out to be a major step to strengthen the regions' political

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<sup>17</sup> This argument has been advanced in: Birch (1978: esp.334-336); see as well for this aspect: Coverdale (1975).

<sup>18</sup> See: Mawsan/ Martins/ Gibney (1985); Cameron (1981); Pinder (1986).

<sup>19</sup> With respect to the level of policy implementation in this respect see: Hesse (1988).

<sup>20</sup> This reflects Mommsen's thesis that the global trend towards an enhanced national differentiation within the bounds of the nation-state generates, under certain political conditions, new forms of territorial politics that are able to gain influence (See: Mommsen 1971; 1980).

weight in the supra-national policy process<sup>21</sup>. Expectations and anticipations can become a driving force in the formation of public consent even if the projected accretion of political power is far from significant in the policy process. As the case studies will show, the process of European integration means new opportunities on an institutional level, as it implies significant challenges to a territorially defined collective identity that still needs a strong notion of an identifiable unity vis-à-vis the outer world to secure its internal integration. The capacity of regionalist movements to cope with this problem of the dialectic of identity and difference in highly modern society depends, as will be analyzed later, heavily on the particular way in which they model their integrative collective identity.

2. The second key issue in the political discourse of regionalist actors concerns the distribution of national wealth. If, as described above, loyalty to the national society is refused, economic and fiscal commitment to the nation-state center are likely to become subject to conflict. Rich regions in particular mobilize on the basis of territorially defined interests vis-a-vis the nation-state. In times in which unprecedented economic growth is becoming less and less the dominant feature of social reality, regions as political actors tend to define their socio-economic interests as only partly compatible with those of the nation-state into which they are integrated. In this respect, regionalism reacts to the - in capitalist societies structurally given - uneven development and distribution of economic wealth and political power between the center and periphery. With renewed fights over the distribution of scarce economic resources regionalist forces have come to question the rationale of the national economic and fiscal system.

In the 1960s Robert Lane could describe the agenda of the modern nation-states as the "politics of consensus in the age of affluence" (Lane 1965). This agenda has changed substantially. In contrast to this idyllic picture the current situation is often conceived of as one characterized by a paralysing clash of interests and the incapacity of the national government to manage it. The claims of the regions accuse the centralized nation-state of not meeting the needs of the people in the peripheries. With the end of generous transfer payments and development programs, national politics has recently had to face a politically pertinent discrepancy between rising expectations in the peripheries and the increasingly

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<sup>21</sup> See on this issue Keating & Jones (1985), Burgess (1989) and from a highly critical point of view: Anderson (1991).

limited range of the regulation capacity of the nation-state<sup>22</sup>. In the discourse of regionalist movements these features are used to picture its community as deprived of the wealth produced in the region itself. The territorially defined collective identity here serves as the legitimating basis on which interest structures are redefined and made subject to political conflict. What is thus at stake is the question of how the legitimacy of state politics and the disputed adequacy of the political institutions of the nation-state to guarantee political rights and social entitlement which are perceived as legitimate.

3. The third main element in the discourse of territorial movements is the fight for the recognition of identity itself. The symbolic and ritual confirmation of the territorially defined collective identity serves as the central mode of generating the consensus for political mobilization and establishing an overarching frame of reference by which social reality is interpreted. On the basis of their collective identity, regionalist movements use another important element in their discourse with which they challenge the nation-state. The politicized reference to a territorial entity can become a crucial ideological means in attacking established political elites. Beyond principles of territoriality in a narrower sense general questions of political legitimacy are here concerned. The territorial identity here is essentially based on the antagonism to the dominant actors of national politics.

As Pizzorno describes, due to a decreasing attraction of uniform catch-all parties, new conflicts emerge in Western societies that are based upon the recognition of identity which is a non-negotiable issue (Pizzorno 1981, 1986). The politicized collective identity defined by the belonging to a territorially demarcated community is perceived to be radically different from the bargaining process in 'normal politics'. It establishes an agenda that allows for political polarization and, through the categorical alternatives of either belonging to this collectivity or not, it promises an obvious and polarizing political orientation in a system of assimilating *Volksparteien* ('people's parties') and against the background of declining class-based lines of political conflict. The appeal for regional autonomy is a highly normative, often significantly emotionalized notion which formulates a political agenda for radical change in politics. In evident contrast to the political practice of the established mass parties, new territorial movements represent a political approach that owes much of its attraction to the fact of ideologically going beyond a mere technocratic administration of public affairs. In this

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<sup>22</sup> Political conflict is, however, not directly dependent on the degree of fiscal scarcity.

respect territorial movements run against the trend in Western societies described as the 'end of ideology'.

However, the concrete political strategy developed on the basis of such a claim is in fact open to politically highly diverse concrete solutions and programmatic orientations. Evoking the idea of a radically different form of social and political integration, the question of how to translate the notion of territorial self-determination into concrete institutional change becomes critical. The smaller the commitment to single political projects, and the further away from the positions at which pragmatic decisions have to be taken, the greater is the attraction of these territorial movements for an electorate which is disappointed with the established parties and the 'political class'<sup>23</sup>. In this respect, political projects that are based on features of communal belonging are designed to appeal to those social strata whose political attitude is characterized by a detachment from 'official politics'. The national 'catch-all parties' are accused of insufficiently representing the political claims of the people in the periphery. It is in this context that Hüglin speaks of regionalism as an authentic response to the social and political problems prevalent in contemporary society. Regionalism is interpreted by him as a form of political protest which shows a novel dimension of societal conflict. It claims to set forth a broadening of political participation - a claim crucial to modernity<sup>24</sup> - directed against the political-administrative and socio-economic centrality of state agencies.

It is worth pointing out that the claim for participatory political rights and for socio-economic entitlements on the part of regional communities provoke the reaction of the nation-state which legitimacy is questioned. Such attempts to inaugurate a process of inclusion-exclusion within a national community on the basis of regionally framed collective identities stimulates an intensified discourse on the traditional symbols and resources of national integration (Mayer 1993)<sup>25</sup>. In a state of crisis the traditional form of political legitimation and integration on the basis of national symbols seeks to fight for its survival. It goes without saying, however, that the situation in Western Europe is decisively shaped by the particular national context and the ability of nationalist groups to mobilize latent dissatisfaction around

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<sup>23</sup> See on this point the discussion in Chapter III.

<sup>24</sup> With regard to the relation of changed values in industrial society and the claim of broadened participation see: Kaase (1979). See also: Steinbach (1979); Bottomore (1979).

<sup>25</sup> A particular case in this respect is the unified Germany; see: Weißmann (1993).

their agenda. The particular dynamic in the discourse of territorial movements and the counter-discourse of national elites will be focal point of analysis in the Italian case studies. In this perspective, it will be shown of how the dissimilar collective actors under investigation respectively use the general framing of regionalist movements in their attempt to legitimize their claims and to spur political mobilization.

### **2.3. Territorial Politics as an Effective Political Agenda**

In the light of the general framework of the political discourse and the new political opportunities of regionalist actors, the protest against the nation-state as the dominant cultural and political framework establishes lines of political conflict that lie at the core of modern society. Paul Piccone draws one of the most radical pictures regarding the challenge regionalism means to the established nation-state's political elite in contemporary society. According to him, the rise of regionalist movements indicates a severe crisis in the liberal model of the centralized welfare state; they are "an expression of a growing impatience with the waste, inefficiency, counterproductivity and questionable rationality of an increasingly distant central government." (Piccone 1992) The growing political demand for a thorough federal order is seen as a reaction to homogenizing and centralizing tendencies endemic to the modern welfare state. They are portrayed not only as dismantling traditional social communities but furthermore are described as being essentially dysfunctional in economic terms and falling short of realizing the democratic ideal upon which their political legitimacy is built. According to him the liberal welfare state has produced its own negation. The prevailing crisis of the 'technocratic redistributive welfare state' produces a viable political alternative, namely, the substitution of the nation-state by 'autonomous organic communities' which are designed to allow the participatory quality of politics which the national welfare states are not able to ensure<sup>26</sup>.

This new social conflict and the call for decentralization expressed by the regional movements have not been adequately perceived. Politicians as well as political scientists have been very slow to recognize the call for decentralization in its impact on politics in Western Europe (not to mention recent developments in Eastern Europe). On the ideological level, this

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<sup>26</sup> In this context Piccone (1992b; see also Piccone 1992a, 1991-92) develops the notion of an emancipatory 'populism', a highly debatable concept to which I will return later.

is reflected by a systematic neglect of the idea of decentralization and federalism as an alternative to the centralized nation-state. Hüglin recently demonstrated that federalism with its legitimating reference to the notion of participatory self-determination was historically as well as theoretically defeated by the centralized and omnipotent nation-state (Hüglin 1991). Even today, in the mainstream evaluation of the political claims of regionalist movements, the struggle for new forms of spatial collective identities is often seen as unimportant protest. On the contrary, it should be stressed that the phenomenon of the renewed political significance of regionalist movements since the 1960s suggests the

possibility that regionalism may become an independent variable, an irreversible process in itself which will shape the fate of western society and the nation-state at least for the foreseeable future. (Hüglin 1986:440)

Against the background of the questioned authority of the nation-state and the growing awareness of the inadequacy of its political instruments to fulfill its legitimating promises, the recourse to the region as the decisive social and political unit expresses a rational response to the challenges of modern society. It opens the perspective on a new form of social integration; it suggests a solution to the phenomenon of "societal fragmentation in highly complex industrial societies" (Hüglin 1986:454). Or, as Tiryakian puts it,:

The political and economic advantages of a powerful central government are becoming increasingly questionable and decentralization if not disaggregation may be viewed as modern a tendency as aggregation was a few generations ago, one necessary to revitalize the grassroots' productive energies of social actors. Further, increase or development of the nation-state comes at the expense of other things which matter in an existential way of group identity, in organize and control their situation. (Tiryakian & Nevitte 1985:82)

Viewing regionalism as a disintegrative force in nation-state politics which seems to allow new forms of societal integration on an extended scale<sup>27</sup>, some critical questions need to be answered. By employing which interpretative frames does it become probable that the distance to the centers of political power and 'legitimate' cultural life is above all seen as a source of distinct identity and hence as a chance for political mobilization (instead of as a laming condition of deprivation)? How do regionalist movements use their core issues to establish an effective counter-discourse against the national political elite and to instigate processes of political mobilization? In which way does the agenda established by them find political resonance in contemporary society? Focusing more closely on the mobilization dynamics generated on the basis of the political agenda of territorial movements, it will

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<sup>27</sup> See for this discussion the instructive work of Dan Roven (1979).

become possible to highlight the challenge which territorial politics in its regionalist expression presents to traditional politics in West European society. The conditions have to be looked at especially in terms under which the region as a main point of reference for political engagement can develop an effective mobilizing dynamic. In this context, it is necessary to take into consideration the particular nature of the mobilization process generated by different types of territorial movements and their respective prospect of changing the patterns of traditional politics. Such a perspective also means shedding light on the specific difficulties involved in sustaining a political loyalty built on a territorially based collective identity. Given this closer attention to the socio-political context in which territorial movements have gained new political salience, the next chapter will provide the theoretical grounds for the interpretation advanced in the case studies.

Territorial politics will be looked at as a disintegrating force in national political system which is based on the image of a growing estrangement between citizens and 'official politics'. The more recent forms of regionalist or territorial movements are accordingly interpreted as a productive reaction to, and simultaneously a driving force in what has become known as the 'crisis of the political class'. New issues have entered the discourse of what is normally labeled uniformly as 'regionalism', significantly changing the ideological orientation and mobilizing dynamic of these political actors. As the case studies illustrate, there is a significant correspondence between the discourse on the unresponsive 'political class' and the thematic fields that are made the basis of the political mobilization generated by new territorial movements.

## Chapter III

### **Territorial Politics and the Populist Request for a New Basis of Citizenship**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

In the preceding chapter's discussion, participatory political rights were - next to the recognition of the collective identity and socio-economic groups entitlements - identified as lying at the core of territorial politics. This crucial element of regionalist movements' political discourse needs further attention. How do these actors link their territorially framed collective identity to the discourse on political participation - an agenda which as such shows no straightforward reference to the principle of territoriality? The aim of this chapter is to illustrate how these movements are able to establish a politically forceful agenda by utilizing populist forms of mobilization. The underlying hypothesis is that the anti-elitist and politically polarizing features of populist protest and the strong notion of communal belonging of territorial movements, can be convincingly integrated for purposes of political mobilization. It is by incorporating elements of the populist agenda that territorial movements are enabled to essentially widen the platform of regionalist protest and to generate a mobilization dynamic with new patterns of consensus formation<sup>1</sup>.

In pointing to the challenge which regionalist movements pose to national regimes, the basic notion of their claims can be described as genuinely related to the debate on how an individual's societal integration into the wider political community is legitimized and secured. At the core of the discourse on the recognition of their collective identity and socio-political rights is the controversy about the very basis of citizenship. The common element appearing in the rhetoric of the regionalist challenge to the nation-state is an emphasis on the importance of the location of an individual's residence. The spatial reference is in this perspective primarily perceived - in strict political terms - as a way of social integration and political representation superior to that established in the present nation-state. At least as a mobilizing idea (often less as a concrete organizational model for societal reconstruction) a normative reference to a rejuvenated idea of citizenship is made. The reference to citizenship here is understood as the intensified debate over the rights, duties and status of the individual which are no longer firmly defined in terms of membership of a national community (Andrews

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<sup>1</sup> The interpretive framework elaborated here will serve as a crucial reference point in interpreting the Italian case of Lega and in pointing to its political identity beyond traditional forms of regionalism.

1991)<sup>2</sup>. In harmony with the claim of being deprived of a substantial say in national politics, the idea of citizenship is thematized to point to the denied citizen's right and capacity to influence public affairs. Positively framed, notions of self-determination and self-empowerment of citizens vis-à-vis the nation-state are powerful ideological tools in attacking the basis on which social integration is traditionally reproduced.

Issues such as the protest against a supposedly overwhelmingly potent center, decentralization and the corresponding affirmation of the local and small territorial unit are at the very core of the debate on citizenship. In this, the attachment to a territorially defined community is a main feature in redefining its legitimating basis. It is crucial to the political project of regionalist collective actors that the legitimacy of nation-state agencies is questioned and accused of inadequately representing the interests of the community. Their political claims are legitimized by pointing to local society which citizens are said to have no voice in national decision making and to be deprived of their legitimate entitlements. In its most radical form, the demand for regional self-determination questions the authority of the wider political community and the institutions on which the nation-state is built. In this respect, the agenda of regional self-determination fits in very well with the wider dissatisfaction with the political system's democratic-participatory qualities.

In advancing this argument, regionalist movements employ the popular image of the conflict between the (national) state and regional or local civil society<sup>3</sup>. Here, the recourse to civil society is to be understood as a political manifestation against hindered democratic participation and suppressed social rights. In attacking the national political elite, an important ideological reference is made to the self-organizing capacity of citizens in a realm beyond the direct control of nation-state agencies and institutions. In drawing distinctive boundaries to national politics the community is portrayed as disposing of values and civic traditions which are incompatible with those in the nation-state. The proclaimed incongruence between the

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<sup>2</sup> Along these lines, see the interpretation of Boguslawski according to which regionalism is an expression of a severe crisis of trust between the citizen and the nation-state: Boguslawski (1983).

<sup>3</sup> In this context it is not necessary to enter into a discussion on the concept of civil society. It is a concept which, given its inherent lack of a clear definition, has been used in historically and politically quite different contexts and has thus been equipped with normatively far from coherent idea (Heins 1992, Naumann 1991). What is worth considering here is foremost why the notion of civil society has become so prominent in political and academic discourse (particularly regarding the form of political protest behavior that is looked at). With the politically virulent discourse on the 'crisis of representation' and corresponding widespread critique of the ruling *political class* in Western societies there has been a notable new interest in the concept of civil society (Cohen/ Arato 1992; Kymlicka/ Norman 1994).

interests articulated in civil society and their (deficient) representation in the political system is a central reasoning in questioning the legitimating resources of the national institutional setting of politics.

Along these lines, regionalist movements can relate their discourse to a politically appealing issue for which the spatial reference is only of subordinate significance. The intensified discourse on civil society expresses strong anti-statist feelings directed primarily towards the main political representatives of state institutions: the established parties<sup>4</sup>. Based on images of communal belonging these anti-party sentiments have become a crucial resource for those proclaiming discontent with current politics. It has emerged as a powerful tool for protest behaviour that proclaims to be outside of, and therefore untainted by, the dominant traditional parties. The perceived performance of party government (problem solving capacity) and the intentions of the national governing elite have given rise to protest which claims to act on behalf of the 'ordinary citizen' vis-a-vis professional politicians.

In order to appreciate how regionalist movements are able to incorporate this agenda into their approach and to benefit from the widespread, however, diffuse critical attitude vis-à-vis the ruling elite and the oligarchical process of decision-making it has established, the features of populist mobilization have to be looked at in more detail. In this context, attention will focus on how territorial politics and the populist protest against the *political class*<sup>5</sup> form a resourceful political agenda which effectively challenges the nation-state's elites. The following section introduces the concept of populism, its main features and how this concept can be analytically useful in coming to terms with a widened agenda of territorial politics.

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth pointing out that the notion of civil society implicitly suggests a protest in the name of left-libertarian actors, it has become manifest that this critique of the ruling class can be utilized for politically different goals. Obviously the reference to civil society as the position from where to fight state authority and question the legitimacy of bureaucratic structures is not the exclusive domain of the left. Especially if the opposition to monopolistic business interests is left out and the critique is primarily directed against state agencies, the opposition against the actually governing regime in the name of civil society can be articulated by political forces which are not necessarily oriented towards any kind of socialist blueprint for society.

<sup>5</sup> On the notion of the 'political class' and its use in academic discourse see: von Beyme (1992,1993).

### 3.2. The Concept of Populism

The widespread and far from coherent use of the term "populism" in academic as well as in public discourse means that its definition lacks clarity. Traditionally condemned as anti-democratic or even irrational in character<sup>6</sup>, there has more recently been an increased interest in populism as a grass-roots protest movement. However, the American and European discussions differ substantially in this respect. Whereas in the European discussion the notion of populism is first of all the object of ideological disputes, in the US this concept has not been theoretically overloaded and has been used more as an analytical category to refer to a certain type of protest behavior. This might be due to the fact that populism resonates with and is part of the American political culture (Goodwyn 1976,1978), while the European in particular left has tended to reduce populism to its indisputable racist and antidemocratic tendencies.

Beyond this difference in the theoretical discourse on populism in both contexts there is no agreement on the political nature of populist movements. Political actors of both the right and the left can be equally labeled as populist. For example, in the American case, academics refer to the notion of populism in order to describe two politically contrasting formations during the same period. The neo-conservative wave under R. Reagan was called populist (Coles 1980) in just the same way as those political forces and grass-roots movements which counteracted this development to the right in the name of democratic control and local self-determination (Kazin 1986). According to the respective interpretations, both Reagan's accent on traditional, family-based small town America and grass-roots protests against unjustified power structures can be described as 'populist'<sup>7</sup>. Accordingly, Laclau states,

(W)e know intuitively to what we are referring when we call a movement or an ideology populist, but we have the greatest difficulty in translating the intuition into concepts. (Laclau 1977: 143)

The remarkable multitude of meanings this term encapsulates, rather than a result of an insufficient effort of academics to come to some kind of adequate definition, has a *fundamentum in re*. Populism can not be perceived as either a coherent political force, or a clearly defined ideological set of values. Taken on its own terms, populism does not provide

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<sup>6</sup> See for a discussion of these interpretations: Allcock (1971).

<sup>7</sup> For a proposal to distinguish 'good' and democratic, left-liberal populism from regressive right wing populism see: Boyte (1984); Kann (1982).

an insight into the political goals actually pursued by the particular movement. Given the diversity of political movements labeled 'populist', Canovan proposes a descriptive typology, which does not aim at identifying a common economic program, social base or political style typical of populist movements (Canovan 1981, 1982). According to her, any attempt to prove a common defining feature of populism is doomed to failure. The 'farmer's radicalism' of late nineteenth century America, the *Narodniki* in Russia, Argentinean Peronism, 'populist democracy' as represented by the American Progressives and forms of reactionary populism cannot be adequately classified by one single concept. Nevertheless, regarding recurrent features in its political concerns and social base, one can reasonably argue that it is more than a common rhetoric as suggested by Canovan<sup>8</sup>. Focusing mainly on the form of political mobilization some links at least can be identified between the many political and intellectual movements that have been to some degree populist in character.

One fruitful approach in this respect is to examine more closely the signified actor and legitimating base of populist movements. The reference to the people - populism as the *vox populo* - points to a rather unspecified collectivity. Populism obviously owes much of its attraction to this notion of a community in which social differences among the single members become insignificant. The promise of an embracing solidarity amongst a loosely assigned constituency is one of the most decisive elements of the success of populist movements. It is crucial for populism that a unifying sense of the 'we' makes the existence of an internal social differentiation irrelevant in the self-assessment of its supporters. The legitimating reference to 'the people' suggests a political force which is acting in favor and in the name of the 'public interest', regardless of the social or cultural background of the single citizen of this agency. According to this image the unifying bonds of this community are said to be stronger than the differences deriving from the profession and social prestige of the individuals<sup>9</sup>. To accurately understand the attraction of populist forces one has to take

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<sup>8</sup> See also Federici's evaluation according to which "(P) populism is also difficult to define because it is more a sentiment within a larger political and social context than a systematic political theory or ideology." (1985: 25).

<sup>9</sup> This claim is reflected in a definition of populism given by a confessed 'populist'. For the latter, populism is a: "(R)ule by the majority of electors for the benefit of all, not for the benefit of minority, special interests pressure groups (Carto 1982:4)". Some scholarly theories share this view. For example, Laclau speaks about populism of a 'specific non-class contradiction'. According to him, alongside class conflict this contradiction is given 'objectively' by the clashing interests of the people and a 'power block'. "Populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc." (p.173) Notwithstanding its suggestive simplicity, this approach takes no concrete steps forward in

into consideration this egalitarian energy that is inherent in its ideological framing. However, this claim of unifying social bonds beyond existing inequalities between individuals does not mean that populist movements are necessarily non-hierarchical in character. Regarding their internal power structures and the social consequences in terms of the changing patterns of domination that this political force provokes, the populist agenda can be used for both democratic and authoritarian solutions. To understand the dynamic and attraction of populist mobilization it is necessary to identify the decisive elements of its agenda.

### 3.2.1. Some Crucial Characteristics of Populism

A phenomenological typology as such does not, as Canovan (1981) suggests, render superfluous a theoretical attempt to evaluate the usefulness of the concept 'populism'. As a first step it seems advisable to identify some key elements of populism in terms of the political aspirations of its approach and - closely related to this - regarding the action forms this political force takes. Against this background a better understanding of the source of success and, on the other hand, the internal contradictions and inconsistencies of populism becomes possible. These central elements of populism are the following:

a. For populist political forces it is decisive to refer to the 'ordinary' citizen by using a commonly shared language and by raising those issues that are of high priority for 'the man on the street'. It is crucial to the anti-elitist impulse endemic to populism that it sets the rationality of common sense sharply against the discourse of the social and political elite (especially business figures, professional politicians and intellectuals). Populist movements are successful in mobilizing people because they profit from the feeling of being "betrayed by the greed of special interests, manipulated by remote elites." (Ansara & Miller 1986) Populism is often portrayed as a grass-roots rejection of more formal and unresponsive political decision making. Consequently, the starting points of populist campaigns are usually issues which can be easily related to the daily life experience of the potential constituency and supporters.

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explaining the phenomenon of populism. In accepting the self-image of populist political forces, it confuses the self-assessment of social actors with their actual political meaning.

With regard to the language as well as the way political issues are presented, populist politics opposes the prevailing political discourse, accusing it of being abstract and removed from the concrete needs of the people. 'Big government' and monopolized forms of business interests are thus identified as the major opponents of authentic 'citizen politics'. According to Tom Harkin, populist politics is based on the assumption that there is a 'potential wisdom of ordinary citizens'. Populism can be described as being built on a common faith in a politicized common sense. "I see populism, and the kind of things we're doing on a grassroots level, as giving people the information and data they need to make an informed decision." (Harkin 1986:238)

b. Populism appeals primarily to those social groups which have been traditionally alienated and excluded from the political process. The constituency of populist movements is not normally composed of either social elites or of the working class, which usually have strong ideological and political ties in traditional organizations (unions/ socialist parties). Until their involvement in politics, the supporters of populist forces are typically characterized by an attitude of disinterest and even cynicism towards the traditional political decision-making process. It is against this background that the advocates of populism can speak of it as a 'mass culture of hope and self-respect among the voiceless' (Goodwyn 1976: XXIII)<sup>10</sup>. Populism is successful in transforming popular skepticism from its most common materialization, i.e., abstinence from politics, to a process of mobilized protest behavior (Goodwyn 1986). For Goodwyn, this is the most crucial point of populism and one which traditional scholarship has systematically avoided. According to him, on the theoretical level two things occur:

Not only are the animating dynamics of the movement missed, but the politicization of the passive and manipulated social formation into a self-conscious agency of democratization is also missed. (Goodwyn 1991:54)

c. Closely related to the aforementioned points is the location and the subject of politicization most frequently dealt with by populist movements. An essential element in the political discourse of their protest against anonymous and unresponsive power structures is the claim that their sites of struggle are of immediate relevance to the people, eg. the neighborhood, workplace and marketplace, i.e., the direct environment of social interaction. In fact, it is an integral part of the populist agenda to polemically confront concrete, local, and mostly

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<sup>10</sup> In this respect populism has traditionally found the greatest response - as Riessman says - "to farmers, the middle- and upper-working classes and small business groups." (Riessman 1986:55)

discrete issues with the attacked anonymity of 'abstract politics'. The reference to the 'common sense' of the 'normal citizen' is rooted in this claim to bring issues to public attention which have a direct link to the concrete lifeworld experiences of its addressees. As further discussion will make clear, even if being symbolically constituted beyond the realm of direct social interaction, for populist movements this recourse to concrete and local issues is a constitutive element in rendering their political agenda attractive.

Reflecting the prominence of this image of an antagonism 'concrete versus abstract', the political discourse of populist forces claims to be predominantly organized around pragmatic and daily life-oriented concerns, and the related campaigns work with the image to give citizens a greater sense of personal control over their lives. Particularly in the American tradition, local populist revolts are often portrayed as 'grass-roots movements', aiming at empowering the native citizenry vis-à-vis forms of domination from outside. Related to this emphasis on local concerns is the skepticism about a notion of progress represented by the dominance of governmental bureaucracy, and impersonal market relations (Pollack 1990) and also by the left's notion of progress as a historically necessary erosion of traditional communal life<sup>11</sup>. In this respect populism is said to be characterized by a deep suspicion of metropolitan society and the complexity of life it entails.

d. In order to convincingly confront anonymous forms of domination, populism emphasizes the notion of community through a strong collective identity. Populist actors claim to have their legitimating roots in the concrete needs of the communities they represent. Populism "rejects any transcendental axiological scheme as binding unless independently legitimated by the community itself." (Telos staff 1991:13) For some authors the legitimating reference to supposedly intact social communities and the political goal of reconstructing these local forms of an integrated society are the decisive features that identify populist politics. For example, Boyte argues that "(P)opulism grows from the life of actual communities that seek to control the forces that threaten to overwhelm them." (Boyte 1986:4)<sup>12</sup> Other authors put less weight on the existence of communal life as a precondition of populist politics, but

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<sup>11</sup> See for the attitude toward progress in populist movements: Lasch (1991a, 1991b). Arguing that the rejection of the idea of progress at any cost and the virtue of accepting communal obligations by the middle class cannot be equated with a narrow-minded and conservative nostalgia for the past. Rather, a critical viewpoint regarding the costs of progress is at the core of crucial questions for contemporary society.

<sup>12</sup> Along the same lines, Piccone states that the originality of populism can be "understood as the vindication of people's really existing cultures, traditions, and customs." (Piccone 1992:27).

instead emphasize the 'commitment to popular sovereignty' as the distinctive quality of the community aspect of populism (Dietz 1986). Regardless of the fact of whether authentic communitarian traditions are really the basis of populist movements, at least as a utopian 'not yet' (Bloch), the notion of a community liberated from unjustified power structures plays a crucial role in the attraction of populism<sup>13</sup>.

e. In their political discourse populist forces use strong features of a polarizing framing of reality by employing strong symbolic boundaries between the 'We', the 'people' and the alien 'Other'. The latter are normally identified as the governing elites who are accused of being remote from the authentic needs of the citizens. This debate becomes politically pertinent if protest behavior does not become part of the established 'rules of the game', i.e. if it does not find a 'voice' in politics. In these cases, this potential for upheaval is pushed towards new and more popular forms of protest behavior pronouncing the loss of authority of established political elites and the growing uneasiness in the face of a highly anonymous and thus unresponsive political decision-making process. This image of fighting a uniform political power block which comprises the governing elite and the established opposition alike, is the decisive element in the polarizing agenda constituted by populist forces. It draws the picture of a rampant crisis of traditional authority and in political representation. The established values and rules of the existing political systems in most Western societies are portrayed as to no longer integrate all the relevant political forces into the framework which they set up.

The features of populism can be summarized by pointing out the central image to which populist forces refer in their mobilizing efforts. The populist claim is essentially based on the general notion of the antagonism between the 'concrete' as represented by the reasoning of the 'normal citizen' and the 'abstract' as the expression of the alienating and hence illegitimate structures of politics. The local setting and political issues with an immediate and forthright reference to the 'interest of the people' is referred to in polemically confronting large power structures in politics. It is on the basis of this argument that populism, far from

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<sup>13</sup> From an anthropological and socio-psychological perspective, Ardrey has described the "need for belonging" as an ahistoric "territorial imperative" and as such a crucial ideological resource in political mobilization (Ardrey 1970).

being restricted to agrarian society<sup>14</sup>, has correctly been described as a powerful tool for political mobilization in contemporary society.

### 3.2.2. Populism, the New Political Agenda of (post-) Modern Society?

Contrary to a picture of a merely utopian *desideratum*, which is either simply unrealistic or, alternatively, compliant to any political ideology, a group of scholars in fact tends to see in populism a new and decisive political agenda of present-day society. Bearing in mind populism's ideological reference to the need of the ordinary citizens, it is not accidental that the populist tradition is particularly strong in the US. As C. West states, "(P)opulism is the most indigenous form of American radicalism."<sup>15</sup> For Goodwyn populism can even be defined as lying at the very heart of the country's democratic culture (Goodwyn 1976:XIX). A class-based political approach has never been of significant influence, nor is the American political scene shaped by severe ideological confrontations. The political panorama of this country has been dominated by the two - not overly different - mass parties, which are seldom flexible enough to cover local forms of citizens action. The overall attitude in political conflict has been pragmatic and guided by an integrative ideology of market type liberalism with a strong 'democratic spirit', i.e., the conviction that communal concerns should be run by the citizens themselves (as indicated in the Civic Culture Study). With the decline of class conflict this agenda and the form of political conflict it entails are likely to gain relevance in Europe as well.

In this respect, P. Piccone draws the picture of a radical challenge which populism - with its legitimating recourse to grass-root mobilization - poses to current politics. He sees in populism 'a real potential within the development of contemporary society'<sup>16</sup>. His argument is as follows: populism is a political force which openly acts in opposition to the 'New Class', the political and bureaucratic establishment in technocratic regimes. Populism originates as

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<sup>14</sup> The social background of populist movements changes substantially according to the particular historic and national circumstances under which it has become active. Historically populism has always carried a strong agrarian component, but this has developed - not least on account of its unstable political substance - in such a way as to meet the changing conditions of a dynamic industrial and technological society.

<sup>15</sup> See also on the difference between American and European tradition of populism: Pomata (1986).

<sup>16</sup> Piccone, Roundtable Telos, p.25.

a response to a profound lack of political participation and local self-control. During the post World War period, and especially in the 1960s and 1970s, the left represented the claim for profound democratic control. However, the Marxist idea of class struggle, and the concomitant notion of the working class as the only emancipatory subject in history, did not succeed in keeping its original democratic promise. According to Piccone's interpretation, the left failed in Western societies just as 'real socialism' fell short of establishing a substantial kind of democratic self-determination. According to him capitalist (monopolistic domination of big capital) and socialist/ social democrat projects (for example the establishment of the welfare state) have tended in their respective political practices to restrain the political rights of their citizens. Capitalism and Socialism seemingly converge in this respect. Hence, beyond this level of macro-political approaches, only populism effectively pleads for the concrete implementation of the right to participate actively in politics<sup>17</sup>. Because it assigns political meaning to the local context of decision making it is said to be the only authentic form of self-empowerment of the citizens.

However, it is important to see that in this interpretation populist politics is not necessarily perceived as restricted to localist forms of protest. It is precisely the underlying argument of such elaborations of populism as the 'new political agenda' that its emphasis on small and non-alienated forms of 'citizens' politics is applicable in complex society. From this perspective, populism is interpreted as an indication of and a blueprint for far-reaching reorganization of political-decision making and the self-organization of civil society. The issues raised by the populist forces can be described as responsive to this claim. They pretend to formulate their agenda as a response to the supposed failure of the great political ideologies ('master narratives').

In this interpretative context, politically as well as academically, populism reflects a new interest in the concrete structures which mediate the reproduction of daily life. The central lines of social and political cleavages are no longer predominantly located in the sphere of production (working class action), but are increasingly organized along the lines of 'lifeworld conflicts'. With its stress on everyday experiences and local environment populist protest

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<sup>17</sup> A similar, although more confused notion of this can be found in Carto, who speaks of a Marxist-capitalist establishment which populism is supposed to oppose to. With regard to the American context Goodwyn says that it is principally populism's "greater sense of self as democratic citizens and a hopeful view of democratic possibility than which is culturally licensed within the modern societies around the globe" (Carto 1976: XIII) which sets it apart from socialism and capitalism.

raises issues which are characterized by a tendency in Western Society described by Giddens as the emergence of 'life politics' as opposed to the historically preceding 'emancipatory politics'. According to him the latter can be pictured as being guided by principles such as equality and justice, which aim at overcoming fundamental structures of domination (Giddens 1991). In contrast to this agenda, political cleavages in present society are increasingly shaped by conflicts which have their base in the individual's desire to organize his/her life (perceived as a choice of a particular lifestyle). Similarly, populist movements can, as can some New Social Movements, be interpreted as an expression of a rebellion against the rationalization of life-world. Associated with this kind of protest is a trend toward a direct form of democracy<sup>18</sup>. Describing the changed agenda of political conflicts in present-day society, Fainstein states:

In fact, it is precisely the combination of emphases on collective consumption (rather than production), on cultural identity (rather than class solidarity), and on territorial representation (rather than national political parties) that makes USMs (Urban Social Movements; O.S.) so important as an emergent force in capitalism. (Fainstein 1985:560)

In evaluating the political project of populism it is necessary to be aware of one crucial challenge which it must face in highly modernized society. Populism is built on a forceful notion of community or, as other authors state, one which presupposes social structures which allow for a communitarian life. As Spretnak states, "(T)he word populism commonly connotes a political impulse based in nostalgia for a simpler time when community bonds were stronger." (Spretnak 1986) This, however, is said to contradict the most significant processes in modern society, i.e., a gradual isolation and fragmentation of the individual and the concomitant disintegration of social communities (Beck 1983, 1986). According to Betz, in contemporary society we are witnessing

a simultaneous process of accelerating disintegration and dissolution: the loosening of social and political bonds; the dealignment of mass support bases for political parties and social movements; the erosion and levelling of classes, lifestyles and grown communities; the end of ideologies, the Protestant ethic; the decay of Social Democracy and the welfare state; a general end to the narratives of modernity. (Betz 1986: 94)

It is against this background that populist movements have to make their main legitimating basis - the reference to an identifiable communal unity - convincing. Here, it is

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<sup>18</sup> Arguing against the notion of populism as a nostalgic and politically impotent longing for the past, Riessman (1986) states that recent social developments are in favor of populist politics. The autonomy of the consumer in capitalist society, the expansion of education, and the decline of respect for authority in the aftermath of the student rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s are identified by him as conducive for the concern of democratic local control and the theme of empowerment on a grass-roots level.

vital to be aware of a crucial differentiation which is central in situating territorial movements in the framework of populist mobilization. One has to consider the different nature of small-sized groups with locally restricted and particularistic political objectives and populist movements which refer to a much broader aggregation of people operating, if not on a national level (Argentina, Poland), then at least on a regional one. These latter examples of populism go beyond the idea of a collective actor established by immediate face-to-face relationships and bottom-up democratic organizations even if these movements employ the idea to be rooted in the immediate interest of locally organized citizens. The agency to which its political claims refer are larger communities with a symbolically generated and primarily media-based sense of collective identity. These broader populist claims still use the legitimating reference to the primacy of the local and concrete, whilst being constituted in an abstract communicative process of public discourse. Being of central significance for the cases under investigation, this broader form of populist mobilization needs further consideration. In which way can these political movements, which are formed beyond a restricted sphere of social interaction, create consensus by referring to the above mentioned features of populism? The theoretically interesting consideration is how these actors are able to make an agenda credible which counterfactually claims to be the spontaneous and unmediated political expression of 'the people'.

This step from the rhetoric, which promises self-empowerment of a certain social group highlights an internal contradiction in populism which has a growing significance to modern society. The more premodern forms of communal life, with simple social relations, are on the verge of deteriorating due to modernization, the more the reference to those integrated communities becomes abstract. The implicit reference to a model of face-to-face decision-making and solidarity, as a scheme for organizing social relationships increasingly lacks a structural base. What seems to be a realistic form of self administration for small scale projects becomes dubious for a highly complex society. Although its very essence lies in opposing unresponsive bureaucratic and governmental structures, the populist agenda as such does not have a viable proposal at its disposal to successfully confront the complexity of modern society.

The structural base for the formation of populist mobilization can hence be described as characterized by an ambivalent feature: on the one hand, broader populist protest cannot rely on firmly integrated social communities as a basis of generating consensus. In contemporary society the individual is increasingly less likely to perceive his/her social existence and

political loyalties in terms of strong ties to a particular community. On the other hand, this fragmentation process has facilitated the formation of new forms of collective identities and related political agendas. Decoupled from the structural location in communal ties and class-based collectivities, new forms of communal belonging become feasible which are primarily based on identity concerns. How can the reference to images of territorial belonging be interpreted in this context? In which way can territorial movements use the populist agenda by combining their reference to a territorially assigned social group with the mobilizing rhetoric of populist mobilization?

### 3.2.3. Territorial Politics as 'Communitarian Populism'

The theoretical explication of populism illuminates the possible affinity between territorial movements and populist shaped protest behavior. Firstly, one critical point in this respect is that territorial movements are obviously successful in providing the spatial reference which populist movements need in order to create a sense of community and belonging. They evoke the notion of territorial self-management and local self-determination<sup>19</sup>. The reference to the smaller territorial entity is responsive to the recourse to the discrete and local lifeworld experiences as central elements of the populist political agenda. Thus, the 'democratic promise' of populism can pronounce to have a concrete reference point instead of being a rather abstract claim. The territorially defined community offers the spatial reference point for populist claims and by this a symbolic procedure to insinuate the authenticity of the 'voice of the people'<sup>20</sup>. The territorially defined collective identity provides the sense of boundaries as the indispensable underpinning for social processes of inclusion and exclusion by which the constituency of political rights is assigned.

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<sup>19</sup> Corresponding to this point Feagin & Capek state that "increasingly the theme of the social control of space appears at the heart of various grassroots movements."(Feagin & Capek 1991:14)

<sup>20</sup> See also Piccone's notion of a 'new populism' which "will have to part ways with its earlier manifestations precisely in this: it can no longer assume a pre-given national context and will have to re-federalize the political system as a precondition for reconstructing local communities and concrete nomoi able to re-legitimate the democratic ethos."(Piccone 1992: 37). This leads him to the hypothesis that "a federal, anti-bureaucratic populism may be on more solid theoretical ground than the standard liberal ideology predicated on the obsolete nationstate." (ibid.: 37/38)

Furthermore, in its eagerness to decentralize, federalist or separatist approaches correspond to the populist recognition of the primacy of local and self-regulation. The general, albeit politically uncommitted, populist idea of an empowerment of the people gains some political substance. For Ansara and Miller, for instance, federalism can be seen as one promising answer to the necessity for an "articulated strategy that clearly connects local action to national effectiveness." (Ansara & Miller 1986, Villa 1992) By this, the utopian ('without a place') promise of a commonwealth organized by principles of solidarity and reciprocity obtains at least a possible spatial reference point for its realization. The protest against the proclaimed alienation resulting from state and bureaucratic institutions becomes more effective if distinct reference to a geographically specified public sphere separated from the state and the market can be made<sup>21</sup>. Thus, the idea of a community loses its detachment from everyday experience and is equipped with an identifiable reference point.

In this respect decentralization, in its federalist or its separatist version, is presented as a crucial mediator between the organizational needs of large societal units and the claim for an extensive decentralization with its blueprint of politics exercised by 'normal citizens'. The regionalist agenda with its claim to advance the autonomy of sub-national entities represents a proposal for the reorganization of fundamental social structures, which can be seen as a viable solution for complex modern societies. However, in contrast to the federalist claim of a pragmatic decentralization of power structures in grand political units, populism gains in attraction by a suggestive, yet politically naive, idea. To draw loosely on the conceptual framework provided by Habermas, one could reasonably argue that populist actors are striving for the extension of lifeworld principles into the power and money-driven social system. In the words of Boyte, it is the crucial claim of 'citizen politics' that "large-scale systems need to be reembedded in human values and a sense of human agency." (Boyte 1989:152) Such an approach runs the risk of systematically disregarding the dynamic of the economic and political sphere, the - conceivably unpleasant - mechanism of the reproduction modern society. Taking a highly critical position, one could argue that the systematic populist disregard of the complexity of social structures helps to support the arguments of its academic critics. According to the latter, the plea for a far-reaching form of autonomy and self-determination of the individual agent is a romantic illusion given these self-regulating social

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<sup>21</sup> Philosophically, in an Aristotelian tradition H. Arendt has developed this idea of the public realm as the space of an authentic exercise of democratic rights (for a discussion of this notion in more recent debate see: Villa 1992).

systems. One does not have to go this far, but it is worth wondering what the populist claim politically and socially means if it does not have a clear strategy of reorganizing the main structures of present-day society<sup>22</sup>.

However, the case of territorial movements again shows that an evaluation of the populist agenda is more complicated than the description of local fights against unresponsive structures of power and domination would suggest. For instance, a region as a territorially defined entity does not necessarily signify a social space which allows for face-to-face relationships and a directly experienced community. Hence, the claim of a regionalist movement to represent 'the people' against domination from outside and to stand for an empowerment of the assigned members of this community, becomes necessarily much more abstract than for instance a concrete fight against grievances at the workplace or in the neighborhood. Unlike these cases, in which there is a clearly defined political goal on a local level and a limited group of people involved, the political activity of populist regionalist or nationalist groups is not rooted in a genuinely democratic grass-roots process of mobilization. Rather, the formation of a regionally defined collective identity is essentially a process moderated through mass media and (at least initially) organized by a core group of political activists. The sense of communal belonging is not primarily constituted via the engaged individuals' concrete interaction but via socially constituted communication processes in public discourse.

This has critical consequences for the integrating collective identity, on which the legitimation of the political aspirations of territorial movements are based<sup>23</sup>. For purposes of political mobilization this collective identity is symbolically and ritually generated rather than constituted by the immediate practice of those who are engaged in collective action. As Luke observes regarding regionalist claims, "(W)e do not really have a working federalism or a strong confederation of small states where power is shared at the local level on a face-to-face communitarian basis." (Telos Roundtable: 23) It is against this background that it is doubtful whether the call for decentralization and a campaign against unresponsive governmental agencies as the most important points of regionalist movements are by

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<sup>22</sup> On a theoretical level this observation leads to the following consideration. Shedding light on the emancipatory prospects of the communitarian claim of populism, Anderson raises an important question: "When discussing participatory politics and communities in which individuals can live, we must confront the fragmentation of everyday life resulting from modernity. The real question is whether the consequences of modernity can be overcome without giving up the emancipation of individuals that modernity also undeniably provides." (Telos Roundtable, p.10)

<sup>23</sup> See for the last point the theoretical discussion of the concept of collective identity in the fifth chapter.

definition democratic in their approach, as suggested by the picture of populism as grass-roots protest. We rather are faced with a more abstract formation of a legitimating collective identity and the correspondingly developed political orientation, the latter being in fact open to a wide range of political goals.

This aspect leads to a more complex reflection upon the rise and reproduction of territorially based protest containing a distinctive populist platform. The question arises as to how far this image can become a meaningful determinant of political mobilization in a social reality which decreasingly offers stable reference points in specifying features of strong communal belonging. This 'imagined community' (Anderson) is not given meaning by referring to the daily routine of individuals, but generated as a social construction in a specific symbolically fabricated socio-cultural space. Hence, the analysis of the formation of its legitimating collective identity, the concrete political aspirations (interests) and ideological orientation of this political actor needs further investigation.

Most significant in this relationship between populism and territorial politics is the way in which a distinct territorial identity provides critical ideological resources for the populist agenda. In these cases, features of communal belonging become the reference point in challenging national political regimes. The notion of territorial belonging is less a defense of particular descent and ethnic roots, but more an emblem of a radically different form of political representation. According to our analysis of the ideological framing of regionalist actors, their territorially defined collective identity is inclined to represent the promise for a more benevolent communal life without proposing any concrete political program. In the following an accordingly legitimized collective actor shall be referred to as a form of 'communitarian populism' the main features of which will be investigated in the case studies.

Assume that the spatial reference is meant to provide the boundaries which give substance to the populist claim of the 'concrete'. Then the basic codes in constructing a territorial identity can be seen as critical to the plausibility of this claim. With reference to the relationship between territorial politics and populism, and its potency in contemporary political conflict, it needs to be emphasized that research on the political phenomena subsumed under the label 'regionalism', mostly fail to take into account the socio-cultural context in which they were formulated. The politicized reference to a territorial identity has in fact been articulated under specific social and political conditions, which have been influential in determining the concrete historical form of its expression. The modernizing process in particular has changed the environment, in which a territorially defined identity is

generated to be used in political conflict. Hence, it is informative to briefly focus on how in highly modern society, territorially defined collective identity can become a reference point in populist political mobilization.

### 3.3. Modernized Regionalism

Regionalist movements have emerged as a response to a very specific historical challenge. In the course of the consolidation of the nation-states it became apparent that standardization and homogenization - as phenomena endemic to the nation-building process - had severe costs for those at the periphery of the nation-state. Ethnic minorities and the existence of particular ways of life were threatened by the predominance of the large political and cultural unit into which they were integrated. Their *lifeworld* was exposed to the intensified process of integration and the concomitant deterioration of traditional social settings and forms of production. In his model of 'internal imperialism' Hechter has described this process during which - on the basis of existing inequalities between different regions of a nation-state - peripheral regions are relegated to inferior positions while the core becomes dominant in many respects. Culturally as an extinction of local and regional particularities (language, cultural habits and lifestyles), economically as an introduction of standardized and highly centralized forms of production, and politically as the inauguration of centralized nation-state's agencies and institutions, this process has led to a structural conflict within the nation-state between the increasingly dominant 'core' and the deprived 'periphery'. This is the background against which regionalist movements have traditionally formulated their political claims. This conflict is still salient today, for instance in the cases of the Basques, the Corsicans, and the Scots.

The issue of boundaries construction is a general one that is common to all regionalist movement that are based on the legitimating recourse to a particular territorial community. In tying their political identity to a territorially demarcation, regionalist movements potentially unlock access to the resources of their region and simplify their efforts for mobilization. To achieve legitimacy and saliency, however, the regionalist movement must convince a sizable proportion of the people living in a particular region that they have political interests which differ from those of the people in surrounding regions. The strength of regionalist claims is dependent on representing the belonging to the territorial entity as something evidently rooted

in and expressed in daily life. In most cases, regionalist movements have striven to achieve this goal by emphasizing shared cultural experiences and feelings of deprivation inflicted by outside forces that have been passed from one generation to the next. Usually language and other unique cultural customs used in daily life give a stable sense of a collective identity. The definition of 'We' is not so much a matter of a reflexive process, but rather one based on inherited tradition.

However, the dynamics of modern society have impacted on the sense of belonging in most regionalist movements and helped to undermine those conditions upon which regionalist protest has traditionally been based. The gradual fragmentation and isolation of the individual<sup>24</sup> is depriving local and regional communities of their identity, and the individual is no longer quasi-naturally socialized into the particular lifestyles which have traditionally contributed to the communities' integration and collective identity. The overwhelming features of the globalization process in the economy and in politics, phenomena such as mass tourism and migration, urbanization, the spread of mass media as well as standardized education and consumption have deprived local or regional communities of their cultural and social uniqueness. A particular cultural praxis preserved in local customs no longer forms a cogent basis for collective identity. In highly modern society the social relation between the single citizen and the community have primarily become the matter of communicative practices. The sense of belonging to a regional community is increasingly becoming a matter of a reflexive process in which individual choice is gradually replacing unquestioned traditional ties.

Correspondingly, we can distinguish two forms of constructing territorially defined collective identities by referring to their respective constitutive codes and symbolic practices. In highly modernized society the traditional way of generating strong features of communal belonging and, subsequently, political loyalty, is about to be complemented or even replaced by a form of territorial politics with significantly different features. What is generally perceived as a current reemergence of 'ethnically' or territorially legitimized forms of regionalism or nationalism is, in fact, an essentially differently molded form of consensus construction as a basis for political mobilization. Under the impression of deteriorating traditionally reproduced milieus and social fragmentation, modern territorial movements can no longer easily use a set of commonly shared beliefs and traditions as a starting point for identity construction. In these cases a feeling of belonging and identification with the region

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<sup>24</sup> See on this aspect: Giddens (1990; 1991) and also Beck (1986).

does not simply exist as an exploitable legitimizing base for the formation of a political actor. These features in constructing a collective identity often have to be systematically generated instead in the process of the mobilization process itself<sup>25</sup>. The constructing of collective identities has hence become subject to a random process of assigning meaning to ties of communal belonging. In effect, patterns of collective identity and the boundaries by which it is marked have become more fluid and less determined by the reference to particular lifeworld settings or features of ethnic belonging. As A. Cohen accurately comments on this modern type of symbolically constructing a territorial identity and the randomness by which it is marked by boundaries:

..the diminution of the geographical bases of community boundaries has led to their renewed assertion in symbolic terms. Since the boundaries are inherently oppositional, almost any matter perceived difference between the community and the outside world can be rendered symbolically as a resource of its boundaries. The community can make virtually anything grist to the symbolic mill of cultural distance, whether it be the effects upon it of some centrally formulated government policy, or a matter of dialect, dress, drinking or dying." (Cohen 1985:117)

Consequently, the political campaigns of this type of regionalist actor do not attempt to secure and rebuild crucial cultural or ethnic features peculiar to the region, as it has been for most traditional movements of this type. Rather, the territorially defined identity of this political force becomes the vehicle and normative reference point for wider political goals. The notion of territorial belonging and an ethnically conceived form of social integration gain here more the character of symbolically mediated features of identity, which means that in politics there is a wide range of feasible options. Most often the protest in the name of one's own community- portrayed as being deprived of its basic right to self-determination - is designed to confront the decision-making process on a national level. A fundamental and immediate dilemma for this political actor becomes obvious: as in the case of the traditional regionalist movement, its claims are embedded in and legitimized by the notion of the identifiable difference between the community in question and other outside ones. Nonetheless, these differences are becoming less and less important in the course of a modernizing process which leads to the gradual deterioration of traditional communities and their respective unique cultural features.

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<sup>25</sup> See on this question: Schmidtke & Ruzza (1993).

On the other hand, however, the liquidation of these particular features allows for a territorially defined identity flexible enough to legitimize a broad range of political goals<sup>26</sup>. It is against this background that the character of the newly emerging 'regionalist forces' without a long historical struggle for self-determination becomes clear<sup>27</sup>. In assessing this, the following thesis can be formulated: the less regionalist movements are rooted in an indigenous history and tradition, the more the territorially defined collective identity becomes a resource for different processes of political mobilization easily exploitable in various contexts. The collective identity based on unique features of communal life no longer determines the narrow set of political goals, traditionally pursued by established regionalist movements. In its less historically specific form, it is likely that a 'territorial' identity is used in order to trigger processes of political mobilization, with substantially different political goals from traditional regionalist movements. With view to the difference between ethno-nationalist movements and populist political actors that refer to a strong sense of territorial identity in their mobilization, Diani elaborates:

Ethno-nationalism differs from populism in the greater emphasis it places on cultural symbols; while ethno-nationalism is usually committed to preserve, and in case re-vitalize, specific signs of difference such as language or cultural traditions, populism is more inclined to build up a rhetoric discourse upon them. (Diani 1992b:10)

Although it borrows from the traditional legitimating source of nationalism and regionalism, i.e., in this latter case the attempt to portray the community in question as eternally given and equipped with uncontestable rights, the distinct territorially defined collective identity is no longer primarily based on features of ethnic belonging and the image of a culturally homogenous community. These changed patterns of 'inventing' a territorially based identity are only partly compatible with the predominant assumption in research on regionalism and nationalism that the strength and legitimacy of political institutions derive from the given congruence with communities which are in turn defined by shared experience or culture. In the formation of novel territorial movements, this identity is constructed around new codes of demarcation and political issues<sup>28</sup>. These are decreasingly dependent on an

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<sup>26</sup> This theoretical consideration concerning the alternative modes of generating a 'credible' basis for collective identity will become essential in my case studies.

<sup>27</sup> See on this point the study of Newman which focuses on the (in this context particularly interesting) cases of the Belgium *Front Democratique des Francophones (FDF)* and the *Rassemblement Wallon* in Belgium (Newman; 1990/91).

<sup>28</sup> This is a crucial point, particularly in the work of Ernest Gellner.

established form of communal socialization which is habitually reproduced in a context of stable lifeworld features and local traditions. As indicated above, in these processes, the immediate face-to-face relationships between the community's members play only a minor role while the mass media based discourse gains crucial significance.

It is in this respect that populism formulates a highly effective political agenda for mobilization on the basis of a territorial framed collective identity. Its general reference to the 'people', its anti-elitist and polarizing political approach is able to provide critical resources for instigating collective action. The populist agenda is not dependent on ethnic features of belonging nor of class ties generated in the sphere of work. In two crucial respects the populist agenda formulates flexible principles of political mobilization which allow for a broader protest than suggested in the concept of regionalism. First, it does not set any restrictions on the potential constituency to be included in the territorial movement. The assigned constituency is integrated by the broad feeling of devaluation rather than by exclusive ethnic standards of belonging. Its agenda is thus effective in integrating those social groups that no longer define their political identity via forms of collective identity shaped by ethnic principles. It is one of the significant features of this newly forged example of territorial politics that, on the basis of a populist political agenda, it is successful in creating 'action spaces' with an intense symbolic communication and a resulting strong sense of collective identity. By this dynamic it is successful to change the preference structures of a particular social group and to create a high degree of commitment to its political goals prominent in the cultural environment in which it has become influential.

Second, the populist agenda is structurally open to very different issues and processes of political mobilization. Populism offers a principally open agenda which allows new issues to be formulated and redefined in response to changing opportunities in politics. These forms of 'communitarian populism' are, given their integrating collective identity, able to integrate new motivational structures into their agenda which are primarily organized around issues of identity and life-style concerns (Beck 1986). In referring to these issues and in politicizing them, these political actors react to a social reality that is shaped by a growing structural differentiation and corresponding diverse experiences on the part of the individual.

The hypothesis is that we are confronted with a new form of territorial politics whose collective identity is integrated by principles compatible with and responsive to the imperatives of modern society. Increasingly decoupled from ethnically defined features, territorial movements have been enabled to approach new and a highly effective ways of

constructing their collective identity. New cognitive principles have gained a prominent role in the fabrication of consensus for political mobilization. To appreciate the political character of this form of territorial politics a theoretical consideration is necessary. Regarding its legitimating discourse, this modern type of territorial politics is responsive to the imperatives of "political society" (Greven 1990). In modern society, norms and the allocation of material resources can only be legitimated by genuine 'political' decisions. On this basis, the hypothesis is that the reference to ethnic-primordial standards does not provide a feasible base for political mobilization<sup>29</sup>. The above-described 'communitarian populism', on the other hand, does not need the legitimating recourse to these standards, establishing a agenda which attacks the nation-state elite on authentic political grounds.

However, focusing on the issue of how a territorially framed collective identity can effectively be combined with the populist form of mobilization we are left with a puzzle that needs clarification: claiming to tie its constitutive reference to the local and concrete, the territorial reference increasingly becomes a matter of an 'abstract' process of identity construction. Through which processes is this modern type of territorial collective identity constructed, and what are the determinant features in forming a new political actor whose collective identity does not arise from a face-to-face context or from established notions of ethnic identification? By which specific social procedures of collective identity construction, are these actors able to successfully generate a cognitive basis for consensus? Supposed that either the traditional class allegiance or loyalties to an ethnically defined community no longer can be utilized as a firm basis for political mobilization, what are the issues that are employed to make such a reference credible? How are they able to substantially redefine lines of political conflict and loyalties and correspondingly to reshape the interest structure of a substantial part of the population?

Analytical attention hence has to be given to the processes by which this new basis for political mobilization is constructed and made the legitimating ground for a counter-discourse against the national political elite. To address this central theoretical point, the first step involves discussing the established theories in the field of territorial politics with respect to the concern as to whether they are designed to grasp this particular dynamic in generating a collective identity. Having illustrated their insufficiency in explaining the construction of these collective identities and the processes of political mobilization built upon them, the second step presents a different approach to these dynamics.

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<sup>29</sup> It has to be emphasized that this assumption holds for stable West European societies, whereas in parts of Eastern Europe we are confronted with a distinctively different situation.

## Chapter IV

### Nationalism, Ethnicity and Regionalism: Three Concepts Revised

#### 4.1. Introduction

The confusing multitude of concepts relating to the occurrence of political forces that claim to represent the interest of a territorial defined entity needs clarification. These political actors, which express political divisions based on ethnic, linguistic or cultural differences, are referred to as regionalist, ethnoterritorial or (sub-) nationalist movements, as well as peripheral-, neo-national or ethnic minority movements<sup>1</sup>. To develop a working definition of the phenomenon in question it is necessary to clarify whether the new political agents in the regions in Western Europe can be reasonably labeled as such. This clarification is meant to open a fruitful perspective in the attempt to accurately explain the rise of regionalist or territorial movements. What is at stake is more than just a terminological difficulty; concepts are the cornerstone of any theorizing<sup>2</sup>. The different labels refer to distinct analytical concepts in dealing with the political dimension articulated by protest movements in subnational regions.

Scholars who are occupied with this issue make reference to three main fields of study which are represented by the following terms: a) nationalism, b) ethnicity, c) regionalism. Given the fact that each of the fields of study mentioned here is covered by a substantial amount of literature, it is clear that no exhaustive insight into the 'state of the art' in these different theoretical spheres of study can be given. In the context of this work it would be more advantageous to concentrate on those aspects which are decisive for a fruitful research scheme. The aim of this chapter is to develop an analytical model, which conceptualizes the above-mentioned aspects by which new forms of territorial politics are characterized in highly modern society. Confronting the problem concerning the fabrication of a territorially defined collective identity as a viable base for political mobilization, some major approaches in this field are investigated regarding their analytical perspective and explanatory reach.

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<sup>1</sup> For a much longer list of concepts which paraphrase 'regionalism' see: Gerdes (1985:25).

<sup>2</sup> See: Sartori (1984).

#### **4.1.1. The Macro-structural Bias in Research on Nationalism: How to bring the Agent in?**

With varying emphasis, scholars have elaborated the concept of nation as an interplay of objective actualities, of historical conditions responsible for modern nationalism and the subjective political will. Conceptually this is formulated by the distinction between nationalism as a 'subjective state of mind' and, in contrast, national development (or 'nation-building') as 'primarily a matter of objective fact' (Deutsch 1981:52)<sup>3</sup>. What is meant to be explained on these grounds is how this 'sense of belonging' to a community, this collective identity which the national idea offers the inhabitants of a certain territory, can become a significant or even decisive incentive for the individual's action. Or, to put it another way, how nationalism as an ideology becomes a socially crucial driving force in politicizing and mobilizing individuals. The crucial question here is how to accurately link socio-political structures with elements of an action theory, which give information about the motivations and the willingness of the single individual to vote for or to engage on behalf of a nationalist or regionalist movement.

In tackling this question, most of the literature on nationalism deals with the historical and social conditions favorable to the rise of nationalist movements. Traditional scholarship in this field is primarily occupied with studying the rise of European nation-states (Sturm 1981:591)<sup>4</sup>. In almost all the more theoretically oriented studies on nationalism the focus is on a macrolevel of analysis, i.e., on the reproductive logic of the society and the existing grievances leading to a mobilization on behalf of nationalist groups. The theories on nationalism generated on these methodological grounds show a distinct functionalist bias. From this perspective nationalism is interpreted as the response to a structural crisis in a given society (mostly pertaining to the modernization process).

Here it is evident that the processes of political, economical, and societal unification which led to the establishment of the major European nation-states are distinctively different from those which - in the second half of the twentieth century - have contributed to the claim for regional self-determination. In the study of the emergence of classical European nation-

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<sup>3</sup> According to such an understanding of a nation as a 'sociological concept' "a nation is a social phenomenon of collective life, marked by a level of intersubjective consciousness reducible neither to 'objective conditions' such as territory, kinship, class (..), and language, nor to other levels of intersubjective consciousness such as class (..), generation, and so forth." (Tiryakian & Nevitte 1985:65/66)

<sup>4</sup> See as an example: Kohn (1962).

states the focus is on the integrative force of nationalism as a unifying ideology. Regionalist movements challenge precisely this binding claim of the nation-state; they are disintegrative forces within the established national unity opposing its legitimacy.

Regarding the proposed explanatory link between the modernization process or the logic of social reproduction and the rise of nationalist movements, no further reflection is needed to see that the current subnational search for regional self-determination has to face challenges and socio-economic conditions totally different from nationalist aspirations in the early stages of industrial society, the so-called *risorgimento-nationalism*<sup>5</sup>. With regard to the political movements in the regions in Western Europe it is hence obvious that theories concerning the rise of nineteenth century nationalism and the rise of corresponding political-administrative entities (states) are of little use in considering the contemporary phenomenon of regionalist protest movements. Consequently, only parts of the classical model of 'nation-building'<sup>6</sup> and the underlying legitimization of this political project, the nationalist ideology, can be used to adequately portray regionalist aspirations.

The rise of the regionalist movements in Western Europe can more appropriately be seen as a response to the deficiencies of the centralized nation-states at a particular historic stage of their development. They do not aim at merely reproducing the formation of economically and politically independent national bodies, but represent a political project in times of declining nation-states which is formulated as an alternative vis-à-vis their supposed successors<sup>7</sup>. As such, the form of regionalism we are witnessing now is a historically later political phenomenon and a reaction to centralized nation-states which by definition presupposes its processor. Therefore, regionalism can be seen as a reaction to and protest against the two main pillars upon which, according to Gellner, the nation-state and modern society is built: a shared homogenous culture and a high degree of centralized decision-making in the political sphere.

Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that in West European societies only some of the rebellious regions actually fight for strict autonomy and hence for the inauguration of an

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<sup>5</sup> See: Alter (1989:28ff); see also: Hobsbawm (1978:48).

<sup>6</sup> See: Rokkan (1975). See also: N. Eisenstadt & S. Rokkan (1973).

<sup>7</sup> O. Dann states that, in spite of these justified objections against the applicability, regionalist political actors have to be seen as national movements. For him with their claim for regional autonomy they strive to bring about the same social change traditional nationalist movements have stood for (Dann, 1978).

independent nation-state. Often they simply do not have the economic and administrative preconditions for total independence at their disposal. Besides, even regionalist activists cannot seriously imagine the establishment, for example, of a nation-state South Tyrol or Lombardy with all the insignia of such a sovereign entity, namely, its own borders, money, and military. In stable West European nation-states regionalist movements normally do not undergo the four stages of nation-state-building which Hroch describes (Hroch 1968:1985). In times of increased supra-national integration and cooperation the 'building of a nation' is for many regionalist movements an obsolete political goal<sup>8</sup>. Thus, it is doubtful that nationalism can be seen primarily as a matter of the size and capacities of a territorial entity and to refer to regions as a phenomenon of 'mini-nationalism' (Snyder 1990:212). To refer to regionalist movements in general as *nations without states* or *unsatisfied nationalism* (Seton-Watson 1971) is appropriate only in some cases<sup>9</sup> (eg. Wales or Scotland). Rather, nationalist and regionalist movements are qualitatively different. As Rokkan and Urwin show, 'peripheries' in Western Europe are the result of historically specific complex interactions of cultural, religious, economic and political developments which are shaped by the struggle against a dominating (and historically preceding) core of the nation-state (Rokkan & Urwin, 1983)<sup>10</sup>.

Besides the disputable application of the explanatory framework developed with regard to old national movements to more recent forms of territorial politics, there is a more severe theoretical problem involved in these macro-structurally based models. Their basic assumption is that the rise of nationalist movements can causally be related to the reproductive needs of

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<sup>8</sup> The concept of 'Province-Building' was developed to shed light on the historically new political challenges regionalist movements react upon. For a critical discussion of this concept which was formulated with reference to the Canadian case see: Young et al. (1984). See also from an economic viewpoint: Hebbert (1984).

<sup>9</sup> See: Forster (1983). See also: Melucci/ Diani (1983). A. Smith defines a nation as a "named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights for all members." (Smith, 1991) As will become clear in the forthcoming case studies, the regions do not show nor can they expect to gain the characteristics which for Smith are the fundamental features of national identity apart from any conception of the state. Likewise, the regions in unrest do not attempt to realize the characteristics of nationhood defined by Mauss: "a society which is physically and morally integrated, with a stable, permanent, central power, with set boundaries, with its inhabitants relatively morally, mentally and culturally united and consciously committed to a State and its laws." (Mauss 1968-74:584).

<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding this difference in their political goals both territorial movements are built on the classical meaning of nationalist claims that the legitimacy of political institutions derive from their congruence with culturally and socially distinct communities.

the societal modernization process. The fact of being functional for certain social structures or patterns has, however, as such only a very limited explanatory power for the respective social action as long as no further evidence is provided as to how these 'functional imperatives' are translated into the formation of concrete action on behalf of the particular social agent. Although it legitimately elucidates the structural forces conducive to their rise, it does not explain the actual variation of national or regionalist movements, their specific political role and consequences.

In this context it is worth pointing to the corresponding incapacity of Marxist attempts to come to terms with the phenomenon of - particularly recent - nationalist claims. Besides those approaches inspired by a crude economic determinism, more refined Marxist concepts explain nationalism and contemporary subnational movements as the outcome of uneven development inherent to capitalist society. Processes of concentration of economic and political power in the center are described as the driving force in producing political claims in the periphery. Since the logic of capitalist reproduction is said to create necessarily underprivileged regions, nationalist movements are perceived as a constant concomitant of modern capitalist society<sup>11</sup>. Hechter's model of *internal colonialism*, which will be considered later, is built on this assumption. At this point it is only necessary to stress that such structural approaches are unable to adequately explain the actual variety of political orientations of these territorial movements as well as the particular mechanisms of their political mobilization<sup>12</sup>. To interpret the diversity of cases of territorial politics uniformly by reference to the structurally uneven distribution of power results in a rather restricted analytical approach.

The major deficiencies in the literature on nationalism thus can be formulated in the following thesis: scholarship in this field has been dominated by macro-structural approaches which only to a very limited extent have proven to be able to integrate an action-oriented perspective. If the agent is analyzed it is mostly only where institutional processes of interest mediation on the level of the political system are concerned. With respect to dominant

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<sup>11</sup> See: Hobsbawm (1977) and Nairn (1977; 1978). It has always been difficult for leftist political forces to understand how national or regionalist movements are able to mobilize people for goals which, according to this interpretation from the left, contradict their fundamental economic interests (See: Nimni 1991).

<sup>12</sup> The actual panorama of regionalist aspirations in Europe is characterized by a range of political goals. Gerdes, for example, distinguishes three major types of political forces in the regions: 'autonomist', 'separatist', and 'federalist' movements differing in the degree to which they are willing to cooperate with nation-state's agencies (Gerdes, 1985:95).

research in this field one can therefore speak of a distinctive structural bias. The concrete formation of a territorially demarcated political actor, the processes leading to its changing political orientation, and its position in a politically contested public arena remain beyond the systematic coverage of dominant research.

Very rarely, the emergence of national or regionalist movements is studied as a dynamic interactive process of interest formation. Rather, these nationalist or regionalist actors, the content and aims of their political engagement, are interpreted as expressions of categorically given interest structures or as functionally determined by broad socio-cultural changes. Only seldom does there exist a successful effort to link the structural level of national movements with its focus on the political and social grievances to which they claim to provide solutions with an empirical, sociologically informed perspective of actual mobilization processes. In almost all studies the question of which concrete social processes generate the conflict between center and periphery and transform the sense of a threatened cultural and political identity in a region into mobilizing collective action, remains unanswered. A convincing model for analyzing territorial movements must show the conditions for successful collective action and the social mechanisms by which it is conducted. It needs to conceptualize of how feelings of belongings are mobilized and politicized in collective action instead of simply taking their salience as an expression of the dynamics of systemic or broad social change.

Some of the macro-structural approaches, however, provide some analytical patterns that prove to be helpful in tackling the problem of how to bridge the gap from 'structure to action' (and vice versa). In this respect those research methods which take as a starting point the societal communicative practice that is critical in furnishing national identity can be seen as particularly productive. For example, K. Deutsch describes the nation as the result of a transformation of a people or of some of its elements in the course of a social mobilization process<sup>13</sup>. At a certain historic point nationalism and the unifying processes set in motion by the accompanying social mobilization are portrayed as indispensable preconditions for or concomitant with industrialization and economic growth. According to Deutsch's model nationalism can be explained with reference to overreaching developments of social change which partly exist as prior conditions of, and which are partly spurred by, the nationalist movements themselves. An intensified form of social communication and resulting processes

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<sup>13</sup> See: Deutsch (1972). In accordance with his model Deutsch explains forms of disintegration in the course of modernization with reference to the fact that social mobilization may take place much faster than political and cultural assimilation.

of cultural assimilation as well as an administrative penetration of a larger community were seen as the necessary conditions for the unifying linkage between center and peripheries in a territory. The gradual (communicative) integration and assimilation of a people is described as a new form of social integration which firstly leads to the development of a consciousness of its national particularity (*Nationalbewußtsein*) and, secondly, to the push for political representation of this territorial defined community, i.e., the establishment of a nation-state.

Likewise, Ernest Gellner's idea of a 'language community' reflects this need for a culturally and socially unified community for modern society. According to him nationalism, with its unifying forces, fulfills the need of modern society for an universally literate and highly mobile people (a unity that for him is brought about primarily through the medium of print). The rise of the nation-state as a unit with strong communicative interrelations is here characterized as functionally related to social problems associated with modernization processes and the emergence of bourgeois society (Gellner 1964;1983;1987).

Both scholars link the phenomenon of nationalism to the transition period from agrarian to industrial society. Methodologically, in spite of their functionalist bias, their conception of nationalism exhibits the crucial role of cultural and communicative processes in the formation of national or regionalist movements. This element provides a valid starting point in developing analytical methods that, however, have to go beyond the configurations of systemic changes and their impact on the social and political order.

In this regard it is instructive to look at the work of B. Anderson and his concept of 'Imagined communities' (Anderson 1983). His approach draws attention to the fact that national identity as the crucial source of legitimacy for political movements in the regions is, far from being substantially given, the result of political fights over views of interpreting social reality (Grew 1986). In this, he reconceptualizes a field of political conflict crucial to the mobilization efforts of regionalist movements. Analyzing the modes of cognitive consensus formation, Anderson attempts, as Kitching puts it, to contribute to a 'materialistic theory of consciousness', which seeks to give an "explanation of ideas as an integral part of a defined, material human praxis" (Kitching 1985:100).

As a starting point for his analytical framework Anderson takes in the point made by E. Gellner according to which "(N)ationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist." (Gellner 1964:168) Although the very idea of a nation is to give a defined community the image of a timeless unity with an

eternal destiny<sup>14</sup>, it can be shown that the idea of a nation, the sense of communal belonging in anonymity, is the outcome of a distinct, historically specific cultural process. The rise of national consciousness is for Anderson primarily due to the performance of mass media and the preceding spread of a common literacy and education. According to him, the medium of print in particular can be seen as an indispensable tool for diffusing the image of the collective identity of a people. In this process the activity of the media, public discourse, is seen as crucial in forming the subjective idea of the nation<sup>15</sup>.

Regarding the crucial methodological question at stake Anderson seeks to bridge this gap with his concept of 'print-capitalism'. His conceptual approach is formulated in disagreement with the vast majority of the studies on nationalist or regionalist movements that take the existence of ethnic, political or economic conflicts between territorial entities as a starting point for research. In doing so they avoid the difficult question of why, at a certain period in time, regionalist claims, which might not have played a major role for a long time, became salient. Referring simply to the political opportunity structure, of which these movements make use, is only one explanatory element and as such it is insufficient. Such a research approach would be unable to accurately explain the dynamics of the conflict at stake.

To summarize the critique of dominant research in nationalism, there is no convincing concept of how the collective or national identity, which constitutes the political actor, is in fact brought about and how it becomes politically relevant. In this respect, the actual formation of the political protest movement in the region is ignored and collective action in the regions is taken as a 'mysterious' transformation of structural grievances into protest behavior. Anderson's attention to medial diffusion of the communal image and his idea of the intimate connection between cultural innovation and political mobilization is one attempt to overcome this analytical insufficiency. His line of argument will be followed. However, emphasis will be put on the particular role of communicative processes in constructing forms of collective identity rather than on broad changes in forms of societal communication.

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<sup>14</sup> Here Anderson shows the similarity between religious belief systems and the national idea. The latter is described as one which provides a 'transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning' (1983:19).

<sup>15</sup> See especially chapter '2. Cultural Roots' (Anderson, 1983:17ff).

## 4.2. Ethnicity: a Concept with Questionable Analytical Value

The concept of ethnicity, even more than the concept of nationalism, is loaded with preconceived notions and meanings established by the conceptual focus as such<sup>16</sup>. Revising the literature on ethnicity, it is striking that a particular conceptual option prestructures the interpretative scheme according to which any case is examined. Even if most of the scholars in nationalism work equally with some ideas of objectively given criteria for national entities, it lies at the very core of the concept of ethnicity to refer to some non-residual form of identity as an independent explanatory variable. The related ramifications for methodological concerns are the focus of this section.

Raising doubts about the analytical benefit of approaches developed in research on ethnicity does not mean that ethnic or primordial forms of collective identity no longer play an important role in modern society. Quite the opposite is the case. What is going to be argued is that traditional approaches to ethnicity are not, due to a particular theoretical and consequently methodological bias, able to adequately grasp the specific political relevance of these features.

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In the early seventies, Connor sought to explain the first indication of regional upheaval in Western Europe with the fact that only ten per cent of the existing nation-states represent a uniform nation in ethnic terms<sup>17</sup>. A specific understanding underlies his notion of a nation-state: a state can legitimately be labeled as such only if it has realized a society in which the collective identity of a population as a distinct 'people' or 'nation' coincides with the political organization of the population. Since for him this is only true in some cases, Connor predicted - with reference to objective, historically given characteristics of an ethnic group (referring to kinship, race, or geographical origin) - an enhanced fragmentation of modern society along the lines of these features. Likewise Glazer and Moynihan state that after the Second World

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<sup>16</sup> For the concept of ethnicity and its use in social science see: Bader (1991), Müller (1984), Smith (1984, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Connor (1972; 1977). See also for a good discussion of the analytical concepts dominant in this field: Burgess (1978).

War the occurrence of ethnic mobilization indicates a substantial change towards an increasing politicization of ethnicity (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975)<sup>18</sup>.

Contrary to widely shared theoretical expectations, these authors state that modernization leads to an increase in heterogeneity, which consequently is very likely to result in a resurgence of ethnicity as a political problem. The new rise of demands for 'national self-determination' is interpreted as the reemergence of ethnic sentiments<sup>19</sup>. From this perspective nationalist movements are perceived as a historically variable expression of ethnic self-determination. As Lightbody points out in his model on nationalism, these political movements articulate the frustration of a certain ethnic community (Lightbody 1969; Possony 1966/67).

Accordingly, political protest movements in the regions are interpreted as forms of 'ethnic mobilization' which is, following the definition of S. Olzak, an expression of "the process by which groups organize around some feature of ethnic identity (for example, skin color, language, customs) in pursuit of collective ends." (Olzak 1983:355) Describing these mobilization processes the authors, who concentrate on this approach, operate with a wide range of meanings assigned to the concept of ethnicity. The term 'ethnic' sometimes signifies only the non-arbitrary belonging to a cultural community, whereas other scholars refer to this term as an expression of a narrowly defined distinguishing feature of a unique *Volk* or race, characterized first of all by physical attributes, language and religion<sup>20</sup>. However, the unifying idea behind these approaches is the assumption that there exists a traceable causal connection between the process of ethnic fragmentation and the mobilization brought about by regionalist or nationalist movements.

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<sup>18</sup> In this context Parming and Cheung argue that the processes of modernization facilitates the continuance of ethnic fragmentation as a persistent source of identity. See: Parming/ Cheung, (1980).

<sup>19</sup> See here above all: Horowitz (1985). Pistoï and Lappierre looked at the new meaning given to the concept of ethnicity in academic and political discussions: Lappierre (1984), Pistoï (1983).

<sup>20</sup> See for this discussion: Bell (1975). Furthermore, referring to a supposed 'immortal ethnic identity' of a people is politically highly questionable. It would operate with a notion of *Volk* developed by extreme conservative theories of ethnic belonging in the tradition of the *Volksgruppenbewegung* ('movement of the peoples') and its successor the *Föderalistische Union Europäischer Volksgruppen*. See for this: Veiter (1977); or: Barga (1982). See in France: Heraud (1967).

Notwithstanding the degree to which authors in this field of study are willing to acknowledge that ethnic identity is a historically variable category<sup>21</sup>, the crux of their argument is that there is something like a non-residual category of ethnic identity which is 'objectively' given. The core idea of the concept of ethnicity is that apart from the historically changing conditions of assimilation, ethnic identity provides a substantial feature, which has to be taken as the major point of reference in analyzing regionalist or nationalist movements. Along these lines, in his influential work Geertz calls ethnic loyalties 'primordial sentiments' (Geertz 1963). In being a constant social reality ethnic identity is described to be in essence different from modern ideologies. As R. Rose puts it:

The existence of such conflicts today is usually the result of the historical persistence of unique configurations of social and political conditions, rather than of novel contemporary social strains. (Rose 1977:19)

More explicit regarding the explanatory reach of ethnic features is Birch:

Ethnic loyalties .. should be regarded as independent variables... In comparison with the rapid change in economic development and political organization of the past hundred years, ethnic and cultural loyalties are durable and relatively permanent. There is nothing surprising about this, for ethnic identity is one of the most unalterable of man's characteristics.. (Birch 1978: 54)

As will be shown in the case studies, the theory of persistent features of ethnic identity<sup>22</sup> which are described as the 'national essence' of the people, surviving for ages until finally they arise anew is highly questionable. Scholars who work with the concept of ethnicity have themselves increasingly accepted that, regarding their social and political meaning, ethnic categories are highly fluid and subject to substantial change over time<sup>23</sup>. Regarding this question there is thus a critical ambiguity in research on ethnicity: pointing on the one hand to the changing character of ethnic features in the particular social and political context, ethnic mobilization is, on the other hand, mostly traced back to historically rooted characteristics,

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<sup>21</sup> Nagel & Olzak state with regard to this point: "Ethnic mobilization is not simply the inevitable result of primordial differences that somehow generate novel or revitalized ethnic identification and organization. Rather, the boundaries around ethnic groups are incipient, problematic, and situationally determined." (J. Nagel/ S. Olzak, 1982: 129). See as well: Horowitz (1977).

<sup>22</sup> Lijphart formulated an 'up-dated' version of this persistence theory by linking persistent ethnic conflict to the decreasing importance of other, primarily socio-economic lines of conflict in contemporary society; see: Lijphart (1977).

<sup>23</sup> See for this discussion and more particularly the differentiation between the 'objective' and the 'subjective' aspect of ethnicity regarding political action: Kasfir (1979). See as fundamental work: Barth (1969).

to a stable origin of ethnic identity. Interpreting related forms of protest along these lines, ethnicity as such is conceived of as the driving force in conflictualizing a territorial identity.

In contrast to such an approach the meaning of the traditional concept of ethnicity becomes spurious when being used within a sociological-constructionist framework of analysis. The idea of 'objective indicators' for ethnic or national identity is incompatible with what Mommsen reasonably described in the following way:

...as a more accurate analysis shows, supposedly objective criteria of national belonging existing independently from the individuals turn out to be historically mediated states of consciousness<sup>24</sup>. (Mommsen 1971:623)

The persistence thesis as such is not able to give an explanation of why ethnic features become politically salient and persist over time. Without doubt, contemporary regionalist movements refer in their political claim to their ethnic (or more appropriately their cultural) distinctiveness. In this, they explicitly make use of the symbolic repertoire of their own 'ethnic' past. However, in order to understand adequately the nature of the 'politicization of the subnational territory' (v. Krosigk) it is necessary to see in which way the citation of these ethnic elements is the contingent configuration, resulting from political mobilization efforts rather than the revival of an immortal ethnic and national identity<sup>25</sup>. The reference to ethnic or national 'objective' features does not offer any help in the attempt to explain the success of contemporary regionalist movements. As Nash accurately observes: "That which is universal, timeless, or ahistorical about the relations among peoples or groups exists at a level of abstraction that is either unproductive further knowledge or verges on a tautology." (Nash 1989:2)

Regarding the tautological structure of traditional explanations in ethnicity, it is worth considering that - as will become obvious in the case studies - ethnic identities and symbols gain political importance where they coincide with and refer to other political cleavages. 'Ethnic separatism' is intimately associated with and decisively shaped by factors which are genuinely political in character,- varying from economic exploitation of the periphery,

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<sup>24</sup> See as well: Kedourie (1971: 126ff).

<sup>25</sup> See in this regard: Gerdes (1985); in particular: Chapter '2. Zur Kritik der Persistenzthese', p.52ff. See also in this context: Gerdes (1979), Sonnert (1987: 35-58). Susan Berger puts her critique of the persistence theory into a question: "Why has regional ethnicity .. become a political issue precisely at a time when ethnic minorities are least different from their fellow citizens?" (1977:175).

governmental discrimination and the resulting frustration of the local elite, to the attempt to systematically undermine the indigenous culture<sup>26</sup>.

In their symbolic fight for a distinctive collective identity and for the political claims for self-determination built upon this notion of 'ethnic' particularity, regionalist movements have different resources at their disposal. These symbolic resources are the result of a social process in the course of which they have been given meaning, rather than the varying number of persistent ethnic features. As the case of the Lega Nord will show, national or ethnic traditions and identities can be *created* where they did not exist before. Of course, the cultural identity of a group is not simply an arbitrary invention, which can be changed constantly and without considering their rootedness in a given political culture<sup>27</sup>. Firstly, the process of assigning meaning to distinctive characteristics of a group of people requires a certain link with the particular history and cultural heritage of a territorially defined society in order to find relevant resources. Secondly, once established in distinctive symbolic processes, a collective identity gains the character of a Durkheimian 'social fact': it becomes coercive and enduring over time. It acquires a social actuality beyond the manipulative will of individuals. Still, the less a community is rooted in a traditional lifeworld, the easier it becomes for political actors to generate new bonds of cultural belonging and to give them political significance. Here it is worth recalling the theoretical finding that the conditions under which these ethnic identities are formulated and used in political conflict have changed. In a society of steady modernization an 'ethnic' or cultural identity is increasingly becoming a matter of choice rather than a pattern of social practices taken for granted (See discussion in Chapter 3.3.)<sup>28</sup>. To grasp this critical aspect of territorial politics the analytical focus evidently has to change. As one of the main scholars in this field of study, S. Berger, correctly points out:

What has to be explained in Europe is not the persistence of ethnic differences - since they are about to vanish anyway - but the organization of political processes surrounding them.  
(Berger 1977:243)

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<sup>26</sup> See for this aspect: Zariski (1989).

<sup>27</sup> This is a point underlined by Judt (1994), discussing the most recent literature on nationalism. He comments on the tendency to see national features simply as random inventions: "Nationalist intellectuals may well invent a tradition, but they cannot invent just any tradition - it must fit within some recognizable continuum of distinctive local features." (Judt 1994:46).

<sup>28</sup> Regarding ethnicity in modern society, Herbert Gans shows such a development in American society. He speaks of the new phenomenon of 'symbolic ethnicity', a form of ethnic identity which is no longer the result of a stable social praxis and incorporated in everyday behavior but the symbolic creation of a distinct group (Gans, 1979).

The questionable reference to ethnic patterns as the underlying source of regional unrest is in a mediated way linked to the aforementioned inability of scholarship in this field to portray adequately mobilization processes. Hechter, for example, in order to justify his concept of *ethnoregionalism*, states:

In all the rarest cases (in Great Britain/ O.S.), separatism is built upon a region's assertion of ethnic distinctiveness. Its ideological force rests upon this claim to ethnic self-determination. (Hechter 1984:127)

This may be accurate with regard to the claims of the movements themselves. Nevertheless, the task of social science is not simply to equate the image which the political actor seeks to give of himself with the actual political meaning of his ideological stand. A closer investigation of contemporary regionalist movements in Western Europe would clearly show that these political movements do not fit into the classical analytical framework suggested by the notion of ethnicity. To put it into a polemic phrase: ethnic cleavages in premodern African states are simply not comparable with the role these patterns play in the mobilizing efforts of regionalist movements in our society.

In advanced Western society ethnic identity is only one line of social stratification amongst many (class, gender, religion); an identity the meaning of which is no longer determined by fate, but by a social process in constant flux. For example, J. Alexander distinguishes between 'primordial communities' characterized by "seemingly natural ties" built on race, territory, kinship, language, and religion, and 'civil communities'. The latter form of identification based on solidarity is described as "more mediated and less emotional, more abstract and self-consciously constructed" (Alexander 1980:7-8). The more a territorially framed identity becomes culturally defined and self-reflexive in the course of societal modernization, the more this identity becomes the object of a process by which these patterns are assigned with significance in a continuous - and in its stability constantly jeopardized - symbolic struggle in society<sup>29</sup>. Although mostly based on phenotypical features, ethnic identities are not structures which objectively determine social actors. Rather, they represent an assigned meaning in collective consciousness in which political significance is everything but given. The crucial question in dealing with ethnic identity is hence why and under which social and political conditions the commitment to a spatial allegiance is able to override religious or class attachments. Thus, relevant research cannot take any ethnic or national

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<sup>29</sup> Considering contemporary collective action, Melucci argues that social movements have become self-reflexive regarding the social processes of identity formation. See: Melucci (1980).

'facts' as a starting point for analysis (in the sense of an independent variable), but has to consider the prior social and political determination of these features. As Nagel argues, ethnic mobilization is essentially promoted by structural arrangement and distinct policies. She comes to the conclusion "that ethnic nationalism is not the stuff of primordial, genetic, ancient differences, but is a child of the modern world with its multitude of fecund states and parturient political processes." (Nagel 1986:107)

Thus, to accurately conceptualize what is meant by ethnic identity, it is necessary to see 'ethnicity' as only one form of collective identity not essentially qualitatively different from others. Along these lines Ross defines an ethnic group as a "politically mobilized collectivity whose members share a distinctive self-identity." (Ross 1980:15) This definition neglects the validity of an essentialist approach and emphasizes the social and political processes through which an 'ethnic' identity becomes meaningful. Perceived as such, collective identity - may it be ethnically or territorially defined - becomes an important determinant of social action<sup>30</sup>.

In these cases ethnic identity does not necessarily clash with other social problems. Rather, particularly in highly modern societies, a strong ethnic identity is often generated in close conjunction with other social conflicts. These ethnic bonds gain their relevance in this context of social and political claims, often being strategically used by particular groups to legitimize their claims. Considering that ethnically based bonds of belonging are thus created out of mobilization processes, we can speak of an 'ethnic situationality' (Haller), pointing to changing features of these communal feelings in different social and economical surroundings. What hence is to be explained is why ethnic identities become the object of social conflict and politicized in particular contexts, instead of taking them as an explanatory variable as such. Consequentially, studies on ethnically based conflicts depend on a more general social or cultural theory in order to provide valid insight into the phenomena at stake. On the grounds of this finding, Nagel has developed a conceptualization of ethnicity that stresses its strategic character in social and political conflict. According to her, there follows from the contextual dependance of ethnicity:

a view of ethnicity as strategic, rather than primordial, group organization. Ethnic identification and ethnic group formation are the choices (albeit socially circumscribed) of actors engaged in social, economic, and political action... The view of ethnic mobilization as strategic organization rests on a conception of ethnicity as rational and volitional... Rather

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<sup>30</sup> For the question of how to operationalize the aspect of cultural or collective identity in social research and how to link this concept to the structural location of actors in society see: Therborn (1992).

than conceive of ethnic conflict or organization as the 'natural' outgrowth of prior divisions among a population (in say, region, language, religion, or culture), the view of ethnicity as 'strategic' stresses the non-fixed, fluid, and situational character of ethnic identification and points to the ascriptive nature of ethnic categories. (Nagel 1984:11)

This hypothesis is implicitly built upon a certain theory about identity in contemporary society. Being fixed, solid, and relatively stable in traditional societies, patterns of identity have become multiple and subject to constant change and innovation. This does not mean that identity has become something arbitrarily chosen by individuals and that the shaping impact of the social surrounding no longer plays a crucial role. Rather, the social process of constructing these cultural identities has become more subtle and the object of a steady conflict between competing assignments<sup>31</sup>. As Nielsen (1985) has pointed out, the inconsistency of the criteria defining the belonging to an 'ethnic' group turns out to be an advantage for a territorial basis for collective action. The collective identity of a social group thus cannot be understood as a given datum but as a matter of self- and external definition, a socially manufactured collective reality. Ethnic and cultural identities are best conceptualized as the socially binding outcome of an intersubjective 'construction of social reality'<sup>32</sup>. In this sense, these symbolic struggles over the meaning of social reality have gained a crucial significance in politics (Melucci 1985).

Nationalist or regionalist movements that depend on a unifying image of the community which they claim to represent, make particularly use of symbols and ritual dramatization. Through these means this type of collective actor is able to diffuse a notion of a territorially defined collective identity and a perception of social reality in accordance with and conducive to the political goals of the movement. As Kertzer states:

Political reality is in good parts created through symbolic means,... Creating a symbol or, more commonly, identifying oneself with a popular symbol can be a potent means of gaining and keeping power, for the hallmark of power is the construction of reality. (Kertzer 1988:5)

As theoretically illustrated in the introductory chapter, in modernized society cultural identity is increasingly - concerning its content - an inconsistent vehicle for the promotion of mobilizing people. This *Verflüssigung* ('liquidization') of cultural meanings (Giesen 1991), however, is no way identical to a loss of significance in politics. Just the opposite is the case. This deterioration of the historical authenticity (regardless of how problematic it already is

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<sup>31</sup> See for this discussion: Kellner (1992).

<sup>32</sup> See: Berger/Luckmann (1971); esp. Chapter 'The Foundation of Knowledge in everyday life' p.31-62).

to use this term) of cultural features in *abstract society* (Zijderveld 1974) is interestingly accompanied by a mechanism which makes these features decisive for stimulating political protest and social change<sup>33</sup>. Dubiel speaks in this context of a growing media-based significance "of free floating potentials for identification disassociated from traditional orientations" (Dubiel 1990:135). To recognize the shaping influence distinct collective identities have on the political process, it is necessary to see primarily not the specific content of this identity but its strategic use in politics. On the basis of this thesis one major focus in analyzing protest behavior in the regions will be on the socio-cultural environment a where collective identity is formed and political mobilization is stimulated.

To summarize the discussion on ethnicity: due to their distinct bias for essentialist features, approaches propagated in research on ethnicity are likely to be of questionable value. Referring to ethnic and primordial features in studying the political mobilization of territorial movements is only beneficial if these are analytically treated as symbolically constructed and instrumentally used categories of political conflict. As such the reference to ethnicity does not explain mobilization on the basis of a territorially defined identity. Ethnicity can not be regarded as the independent variable in coming to terms with related phenomena of political mobilization but as the *explanandum* itself. Ethnic features shall thus be regarded as strategically used properties in ideological struggle rather than independent variables determining the form of the political conflict at stake.

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<sup>33</sup> Regarding this aspect of the central role of fluid cultural identities in 'post-modern societies' and their meaning for political mobilization, see: Pisto (1983). See also Bell, who interprets ethnic identities not as a substantially given pattern, but - in *post-industrial society* - as the strategic choice of individuals (Bell, 1973).

### 4.3. The Territorially Defined Concept of Regionalism

As indicated in the introduction, regionalism is a concept which concentrates mainly on territorial aspects<sup>34</sup>. In this perspective, regionalism is broadly defined as a general commitment to subnational territorial identity. However, this concept operates without a prior definition of the social group with regard to its ethnic identity. As Gottman states, territory is in itself a neutral concept which becomes political in character through the values and aims ascribed to it by relevant parts of the population (Gottman 1975:4)<sup>35</sup>. Although this concept takes a certain given pattern of regional or territorial identity as a starting point for analysis - the existence of a similar political, social, and cultural background - it is above all interested in the politicizing processes in subnational regions and the making of claims against the nation-state on behalf of these political actors. Originally, the term regionalism was used to designate a territorially defined actor on the political (international) scene (Yalem 1965). V. Krosigk thus defined regionalism as "the expression of a growing politicization of the subnational territorial frame of reference" (Krosigk 1980:25)<sup>36</sup>.

Describing a region as a territorially defined unit does not necessarily mean declaring oneself for a form of 'environmental determinism'. From a sociological perspective the defining mark of a region is not territory, but the result of social processes through which the 'region' becomes identifiable as an entity which is characterized by distinctive cultural and social patterns. The form of social organization and distinct cultural habits are crucial to make the image of a common territorial reference a meaningful one to which loyalties and political claims can be directed. Of critical importance - besides the 'hard' facts of the political bargaining process between center and periphery - is the emergence of a collective consciousness.

For a first terminological clarification it is fruitful to start with Vane's conceptualization of a region:

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<sup>34</sup> As will become clear in the following, the study of the territorial dimension is still, regardless of the myriad work on regionalism, a neglected area of political science research. See: Sharpe's (1987) comments on 'territorial politics' in academic research. See also: Tarrow & Katzenstein & Graziano (1978) and Anderson (1979).

<sup>35</sup> See also: Urwin (1980:4).

<sup>36</sup> Likewise, Rokkan and Urwin operate within this definition, namely, that of a "politicization of peripheral predicaments" (Rokkan/ Urwin, 1983). For a role of 'territorial politics' in different European societies see: Keating (1988).

A region is a homogenous area with physical and cultural characteristics distinct from those of neighbouring areas. As part of a national domain a region is sufficiently unified to have a consciousness of its customs and ideals, and thus possesses a sense of identity distinct from the rest of the country. The term 'regionalism' properly represents the regional idea in action as an ideology, as a social movement, or as the theoretical basis for regional planning. (Vane 1968:377-78)<sup>37</sup>

As indicated in this citation, the concept of regionalism has been used in different contexts and has been endowed with different meanings in the course of its existence. Theoretical explanations range from the impact of postmaterial values, to the crisis of governability in complex industrial societies and to increasing center-periphery dependency in late capitalism. Some scholars use regionalism only as a technical term, describing regions as a territorial unit in policy process mainly in the promotion of economic development<sup>38</sup>. Here, regionalism is seen as the administrative answer to the practical need - or even organizational imperative - to link local and national authorities. Understood as such a region is primarily an object of planning and administration without taking into consideration the political or social implications of this reference to a territorial unit. With restrictions one can state that those scholars who perceive regionalism as a form of regional policy carried out by centralized state agencies can be included in this category<sup>39</sup>. However, the conception of regionalism as a set of socially 'unbiased' techniques in neutralizing fragmented development is questionable. It entails a broader dimension of social conflict which even those authors primarily occupied with the policy process cannot deny. As Tarrow argues:

- How central governments and their territorial subunits are linked politically is not only a problem of intergovernmental relations but also one of managing the class and interest conflicts of modern societies. No more can intergovernmental relations be separated from political sociology than can the current fiscal crisis be separated from the inner logic of the economic system. Both take territorial forms, but both are ultimately related to conflicts and ideology that emerge from the functional related cleavages of a modern society. (Tarrow et al. 1978:1-2)

Considering the political conflict salient in territorial politics a differentiation must be made between region and regionalisation. The latter term alludes to the region as an administrative unit in the policy process. Regionalisation here primarily refers to regions'

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<sup>37</sup> See for further terminological definitions: Matthews (1983), especially: Chapter: '1. Regional Differences: Definitions and Identifications', p.12-36.

<sup>38</sup> See: Kasting (1990). See also: Allesch (1989).

<sup>39</sup> See for a discussion of competing concepts of regionalism: Introduction in: Keating/Jones (1985). See as well: Koninski (1982), esp.: 'Kapitel 1', p.1-33.

economic, political and cultural concerns in the context of the nation-state's or European policy process. This policy was developed in a 'top-down manner' (Loughlin 1993) in the 1950s and 1960s without politically involving large parts of the population. Regionalism, in contrast, is constitutively linked with political mobilization, fighting for regional self-determination.

Accordingly, the vast majority of the work on regionalism focuses on the aspect of potential political conflict, resulting from the uneven development between different regions within a nation-state<sup>40</sup>. Drawing on the earlier work of Gunnar Myrdal and his concept of polarization as a result of dependent peripheral development, one group of scholars has directed their research to the economic and cultural dominance of advanced centers vis-à-vis their dependent counterparts in the periphery<sup>41</sup>. Although there is a profusion of research agendas, which come under the heading of center-periphery relations<sup>42</sup>, the common focal point of these approaches rests on a notion of domination and exploitation to which the peripheral territories are described as being exposed. The new perception of regionalism which was formulated as reflections on the regional upheavals in the 1960s/70s stands in the intellectual tradition of the struggle against colonial domination. Regionalism tends to be seen primarily as a vehicle for social emancipation. Hechter and Nairn are the most prominent exponents of this theory, which is well illustrated in the notion of *internal colonialism*<sup>43</sup>. They presume that the source of the regional upheaval lies in the structural unevenness endemically generated by capitalist production. The growing realization of social

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<sup>40</sup> For R. Sturm (1981) both conditions have to be fulfilled simultaneously: the reference to a specific territory and the political movement of a national/ethnic group (p.35).

<sup>41</sup> Mentioning a center in this context means concentrating on the definition of Rokkan/Urwin: "Centers can be minimally defined as privileged locations within a territory... The location of military-administrative, economic and cultural institutions gives the first and most obvious clue to the identification of territorial centers" (1983:25). For a discussion of this perspective: Eisenstadt (1981).

<sup>42</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the approaches and the different analytical emphasis according to which one can distinguish 'territorial system analysis', 'centralization/decentralization dichotomy', and the 'internal colonialism thesis' see: Bulpitt (1983), particularly Chapter 1 and 2. See also: Rousseau & Zariski (1987).

<sup>43</sup> See: Hechter (1975), Nairn (1977). The political implications of this analysis with its foremost operating with the - sometimes only implicit - notion of exploitation and the resulting unjust distribution of resources are obvious. For a reappraisal of the internal colonialism thesis: Tiryakin & Rogowski (1985). The 'leftist' version of regionalism in its purest form is represented by Lafont. However, it is not only the marxist-inspired approaches who see the structurally uneven development of the national economy as the underlying rationality behind regionalist groups. See for example: Beaugegard (1989).

discrimination against the 'province' - inherent in the capitalist mode of production - is thus seen as the driving force behind regionalist political protest.

Consequently, Hechter speaks of a "reactive theory of ethnic change" (Hechter 1974: 1154). According to his approach, the salience of 'ethnic' conflicts can only be adequately grasped if light is shed on the relation between the reproductive logic of the economic system - which results in a specific 'division of labor' between the periphery and the metropolitan center - and the political and cultural mobilization of regional (ethnic) identity as a reaction to it. Correspondingly he defines ethnicity as a "political mobilization, a perception to socio-cultural threat"<sup>44</sup>. The uneven distribution of power and resources in modern capitalist society coincides with and gives new political meaning to ethnic identifications. Hence, ethnic or regional identity is mainly a vehicle for political claims on behalf of the peripheries discriminated against. Hechter's argumentation is summed up in the following passage:

The spatially uneven wave of modernization over the state territory creates relatively advanced and less advanced groups. As a consequence of this initial fortuitous advantage, there is a crystallization of the unequal distribution of resources and power between the two groups... This stratification system, which may be termed a cultural division of labor, contributes to the development of a distinctive ethnic identification of the two groups. (Hechter 1975:34)<sup>45</sup>

At first sight attractive in its simplicity, Hechter's model turns out to have only a very limited explanatory power<sup>46</sup>. Its weakness lies in the central problem of convincingly combining the macro-structural aspects of dependent development of regions and the empirical analysis of how structural cleavages are transformed into political mobilization on behalf of these territories. Gerdes correctly speaks of the dominance of structural factors as 'abstract frame-conditions of social behavior'. As such they are not sufficient to explain political action (Gerdes 1985:58 and Page 1978). Hechter's model does not give any insight

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<sup>44</sup> Bud B. Khleif, 'Issues of Theory and Methodology in the Study of Ethnolinguistic Movements', in: Tiryakian (1985), p.176-202.

<sup>45</sup> With regard to my own research approach it is remarkable that Hechter perceives ethnicity as a creative reaction to a concrete interaction between conflicting groups. Unfortunately his theory is incapable of coming to terms with this dimension in a satisfying way. See: "Far from being threatened by the intensification of intergroup contact, ethnicity is sometimes created, and at other times strengthened, as a consequence of interaction." Hechter, 1974, p, 1154.)

<sup>46</sup> See: E. Page, 'Michael Hechter's 'Internal Colonial' thesis: Some Theoretical and Methodological Problems', in: European Journal of Political Research, Vol.6, 1978, p.297-317.

into how in reality economic polarization on a structural level is transformed into a political regionalist movement. It is remarkable to see that in Hechter's primary reference to functional economic conditions<sup>47</sup> he comes quite close to the approaches he is continuously criticizing, namely modernization theories<sup>48</sup>.

Hechter himself has recently acknowledged that the mere existence of common material interests is not a sufficient condition for successful collective action. According to him his model has to be completed by a microsociological perspective (Hechter 1985). In approaching an individual-based rational choice approach in order to meet the endemic weakness of his structural approach, Hechter implicitly recognizes the strict analytical limits of his formerly developed model. In his radical 'micro-sociological turn', he furthermore gives evidence to my general hypothesis concerning dominant research on territorial politics. Hechter's shift from a macro-structural analytical approach to its extreme counterpart, an individualistic research design, indicates that what is missing is precisely the bridging link between the two analytical levels. The emphasis on the 'meso'-level, developed in the following chapter, is designed to tackle this critical methodological problem<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> See also: Nairn (1977:72): "...the notoriously subjective or 'irrational' elements in nationalism are always functionally subordinate to an economic reality, provided one takes a wide enough development context."

<sup>48</sup> Authors have repeatedly shown that the theory on 'internal colonialism' is not able to offer a convincing explanation for regional protest nor does it provide a differentiated view of regionalist movements (See: Rawkins 1981 and Vatro 1982). In the European context there is ample evidence of the fact that there is no clear-cut relation between the deprivation of regions in terms of economic and social living condition and the rise of strong regionalist political forces. The poorest regions in Western Europe are not necessarily those in which the pursuit of regional self-determination is the strongest. Relating regionalism functionally to economic dependence, Hechter's model cannot explain, for example, why there is no major regionalist political actor in the Italian *Mezzogiorno*, probably the situation in Europe which has the most in common with the sort of colonization within the nation-state suggested by this model.

<sup>49</sup> One step beyond a plain structural approach and one which conceptualizes the motivational background of the political actors in the region is Beer's attempt to link the concept of uneven development to the theory of relative deprivation. Using Gurr's model of 'relative deprivation' (see: Gurr, 1976;1980) and the underlying socio-psychological theories of the Chicago school he examines the motivational and psychological forces behind the political processes in regionalist unrest. "While internal colonialism explains the preservation of ethnic regions, rapid economic development and its attendant rising expectations explain the extra-electoral ethnic protests of the present time." (Beer 1979:216-17; see also: Beer 1980) and for a discussion of this approach: Loughlin 1987). According to his theory, deprivation does not translate itself automatically into regional political protest. Beer focuses on the incentives for political action of social groups by relating them to the potential actor's perceptions of his legitimate entitlements. Regional protest is likely to come about if the limited number of often inaccessible high status occupations does not match the expectations of the people in the periphery and especially those of the local elite. Notwithstanding the fact that Beer is not interested in the process of how the dissatisfaction and frustration of influential groups is transformed into political mobilization beyond the identified key groups, his model does at least partially allow the reformulation of the inflexible theory of center-periphery confrontation according to the needs of a more fruitful research (See for a critical discussion of the deprivation

Opposing structural approaches on somewhat different grounds, another group of scholars - at the other extreme - seeks to trace the regionalist struggle for greater independence back monocausally to the emergence of new values. The new wave of regional protest in Western Europe is here linked to the emergence of postmaterial attitudes. Based on Inglehart's work, material affluence is described as the force which has fostered the advent of values for which cultural identity (including regional identity) and authentic relations between people are more important than the mere increase in economic well-being. The Occitanist Movement is often referred to as the example that shows the dominance of cultural values in the regionalist movement (Tourraine 1985).

No major historical insight is needed to see that the claim to preserve or to revive a region's cultural peculiarities never in itself gave rise to a politically forceful movement. As Mc Roberts (1984) correctly states, cultural identity, economic ambitions and the entrenchment of political resistance become mutually reinforcing factors in regional protest. In their mobilizing efforts collective actors are essentially dependent on favorable political opportunities. The task of fruitful research on regionalism is thus to demonstrate in which way these elements work together in the social dynamic brought about by regionalist movements.

In this context another approach which is worth considering is the rational choice theory. Meadwill, for instance, points out that from this theoretical perspective regionalism in its different political forms can be fruitfully explained as the outcome of a bargaining between the preferences and interests of regions and the nation-state and the capacity of both political forces to improve their respective position within the institutional framework of politics (Meadwill 1989;1990). According to this approach those regions which calculate gain from independence from the nation-state are those which - to refer to Hirschman's model - are most likely to vote for 'exit' rather than for 'choice'. The shortcoming of this approach becomes obvious if one considers that, as M. Weber formulated most prominently: to transform interests of collective actors into political action a rationalization through ideas is needed. As Wilson correctly states:

Objectively specified conditions described at the structural level do not furnish a full understanding of why people are drawn together in social movements. A full account must

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or 'discontent' theory: Kerbo (1982).

also be given of the impact of these conditions on the people exposed to them and how they interpret them and respond to them. (Wilson 1973:67)<sup>50</sup>

The traditional approaches to regionalism are only partly able to come to terms with this dimension of the political conflict and the accompanying processes of mobilization. To go beyond a notion of region as an *ensemble* of social and political structures, it is necessary to analyze regionalism from a socio-cultural perspective, i.e., to look at the symbolic interaction and communicative processes that lead to the formation to a territorially defined collective identity. This kind of analysis gives insights into how politically relevant identification with and commitment to the region is generated.

#### 4.4. Summary

The condensed review of the most influential literature on the phenomenon of political protest in the regions indicates that a conceptual reorientation is needed. The traditional theoretical approaches for the analysis of territorial movements show a distinct bias in their conceptual framing, which has serious repercussions on mainstream methods and interpretations of the phenomenon at stake. Applying these approaches to current forms of territorial politics they cannot explain the variation of the phenomena, explicating it instead uniformly on the basis of broad macro-structural changes. The national political context and the concrete political orientation of the particular movement differ to an extent, which tends to be beyond the analytical scope set out by the conceptually restricted research agendas.

The weaknesses can be detected on two levels. Firstly, on a theoretical level the concept of nationalism and, more particularly, ethnicity often implicitly work with a notion of objectively given patterns of a territorially defined community as explanatory variables. The legitimating ground of territorial movements, their integrating collective identity, is hereby taken as given datum instead than being analytically treated as the result of identifiable social communication processes. This tends to obscure the actual political significance of the single movement, interpreting it rather on the basis of *a-priori* generated categories than as dynamic

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<sup>50</sup> Similarly Eyerman points out: "Like individual action collective action is culturally oriented, constituted within a framework of meaning and interpretation. Action, then, cannot be deduced from objective conditions, social strains or contradictions. Collective action, like individual action, is intentional, guided by the actors' definition of a situation, the stakes involved, and in relation to a collectively defined adversary, an Other against which the self- (group) identity is formed." (Eyerman 1984:78)

formations of political mobilization. Secondly, and closely related, is the methodological problem of adequately linking a structural analysis of the political opportunities to a coherent account of the agent. For a satisfactory approach it is necessary to understand agents and structures as mutually intertwined in a dynamic process, in which none of both variables can be perceived as determining<sup>51</sup> (Melucci 1992).

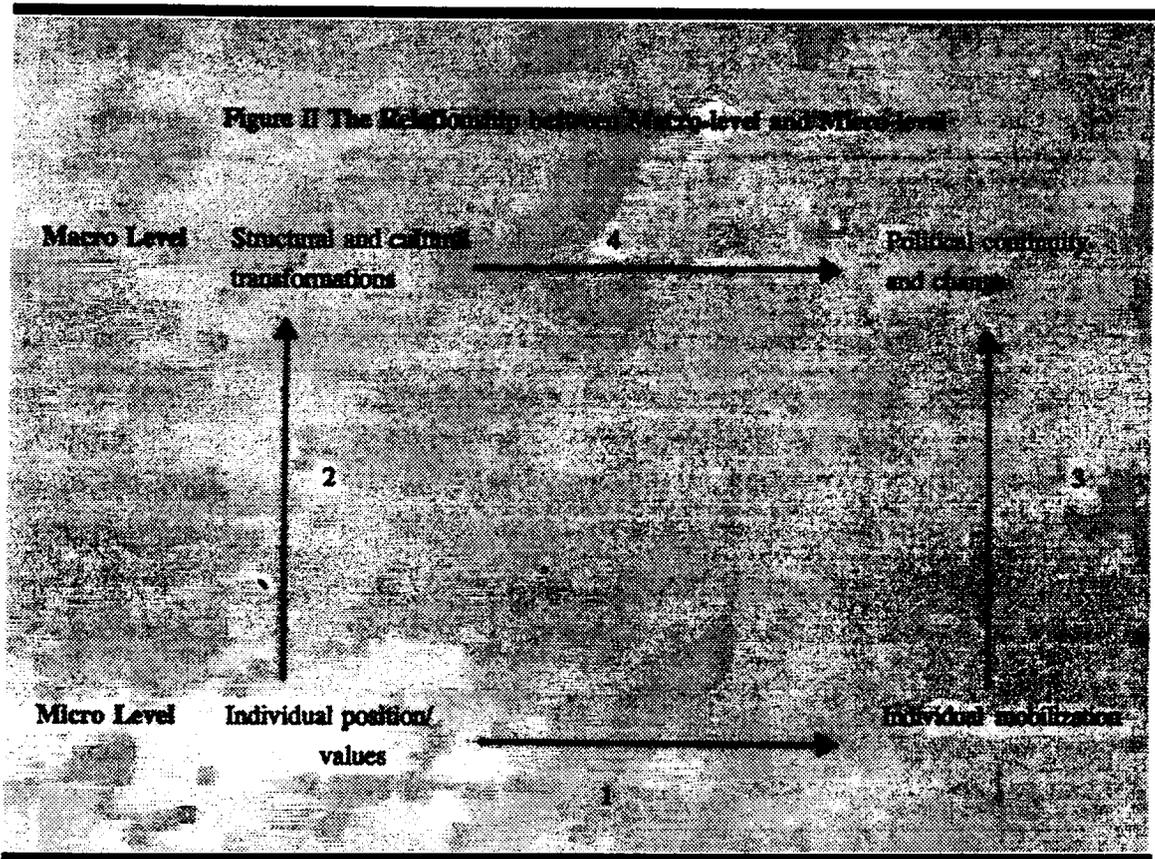


Figure: Coleman's model for research in social sciences

More specifically, what is missing is an analytical framework that is designed to operationalize the albeit theoretically developed perspective of constructed collective identities and the corresponding forms of political mobilization for empirical research. It is thus necessary to develop a research agenda, which allows the changing features of a territorially

<sup>51</sup> This is an aspect of research which scholars propose operationalizing as the concept of 'structuration' (Giddens, Cerny). For them a 'process of structuration' can be conceptualized as "complex patterns of an ongoing but uneven interactions between agents and structures, and as a complex mixes of stasis and change." (Cerny, 1991:22). See for this discussion also Knorr-Cetina. Discussing Giddens she describes the relation between agent and structure as follows: "Social systems appear to exist and to be structured only 'in and through' their reproduction in micro-social interactions, which are in turn limited and modalized through the unintended consequences of previous and parallel social action." (Knorr-Cetina 1988:35)

based protest formation to be studied, illuminating the dynamic form and content of the politicization process at stake<sup>52</sup>. In this context, neither a mere macro-structural approach nor a one-sided focus on the motivational incentives and organizational integration of the acting individuals as such provide an adequate characterization of and explanation for the renewed appeal of regional political forces. In the following chapter a research scheme is presented which is designed to tackle this problem. In a sociological perspective its analytical tools are directed to take political actors as agents constituted in continuous interaction. This is meant to re-conceptualize macro-actors such as regional protest movements as subject to empirical research instead of explaining them causally on the basis of structural grievances.

On a more general level this problem, which is critical for the next chapter's discussion of more appropriate analytical tools, can be discussed referring to Coleman's model (Figure above). The theoretical argument is that mainstream scholarship on regionalism and nationalism is basically unable to generate satisfying explanations for political change and the formation of collective actors on a macro-level. Dominant research in territorial politics is interested in macro-social processes as causal variables in explaining nationalist movements and the political change provoked by them. In these models, it is assumed that structural features, modernization processes, features of inherently uneven economic development, or the emergence of new cleavages will find their expression in related forms of political conflict. How, however, these macro-structural changes are actually transformed into political mobilization, how on an actor level these grievances are converted into effective incentives for political action analytically remains in a 'black box'.

Similarly, the other dominant approach in this field, an individual-based micro-structural research design can not adequately come to terms with the socially generated mobilization dynamic. Methodological individualism categorically excludes 'supraindividual' structures, arguing that social change can be explained by the immediate interaction of individuals guided by rational and instrumental concerns. This, however, takes as a theoretical premise

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<sup>52</sup> This aspect of conducting research becomes particularly striking in the case of the Lega Lombarda/ Nord. The emergence of this regionalist force simply cannot be sufficiently explained with reference to certain structural conditions and prevailing cleavages: because these, at the beginning of the 1980s, did not change in such a way to provoke the outstanding electoral success of this regionalist movement. Rather, critical causal elements of the Lega's success - dissatisfaction with nation-state agencies, protest against political corruption and bureaucratic mismanagement, decline of traditional parties, and so forth - have become so prominent at least partly because of the Lega's political engagement itself. Its emergence significantly changed the expectations, interests and attention with which a certain part of the population perceives politics and in particular the dominance of the Roman political establishment.

an analytical category that is itself essentially shaped by social and institutional processes. The formation of political protest behavior and its impact on the political system are analytically simply treated as the conglomeration of individual values or interest structures (relationship No.3 in the figure). Distinct social processes at work in redefining individually held value and interest structures and in conflictualizing the related issues can not be grasped by such a model. Instead of taking individually held values and interests as a given datum, referring to which the formation of political agents can be explained, attention should in fact be given to the social processes of their generation. The latter aspect, the change in the political order, can not be adequately grasped on the basis of methodological individualism. As Kriesi points out: "A (a) mobilization potential on the macro level cannot simply be equated with the aggregate of the individual mobilization potentials." (Kriesi 1993:12-13). Intermediating socio-cultural processes on a collective level are at work, due to which the mobilization potential is actualized and transformed into coherent political action.

What is hence mostly beyond the analytical scope of common studies in territorial politics is how 'political continuity and change' on a macro level can be coherently linked to concrete interaction processes. It is regarding this relationship (No.4 in the model above) that, in the next chapter, an analytical model for studying collective action shall be developed. Through which kind of means are collective actors able to generate consensus, redefine interests and subsequently pursue them into the decision-making arena by establishing a counter-discourse on related political issues? Here it becomes necessary to focus on a 'meso-level' of collective action through which the emergence and dynamic reproduction of these actors and their impact on macro-political change can be explained. An analytical perspective shall be developed which allows to comprehend the socio-cultural processes by which consensus is created and politicized on the basis of a collective identity.

## Chapter V

### **Towards an Analytical Model for Studying Territorial Movements: the Concept of Collective Identity**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

Considering how to respond to the above mentioned endemic weaknesses in traditional research on territorial politics, it is striking that the insights developed in the work on social movements have seldom been systematically applied to studies on regionalism<sup>1</sup>. Scholars working on regionalism or nationalism tend to lose sight of how the work on political mobilization, done by colleagues in related academic fields, might have developed conceptual tools useful for their own domain of interest. This is all the more surprising since the recent work on social movements offers some analytical tools to deal with the major insufficiencies in examining national or regional protest behavior. If one is willing to abstract from substantially given ethnic or national patterns as supposedly explanatory variables and to treat them as socially constituted features in an ongoing bargaining process, what is to be explained is the political mobilization in the regions along the lines of a particular territorially defined collective identity. This means studying political mobilization as a process by which the existing distribution of power is transformed or, to follow the classical definition of Etzioni, "a process in which a social unit gains relatively rapidly in control of resources it previously did not control." (Etzioni 1968: 243)

Scholars working on social movements have conceptualized this aspect of mobilizing social groups for political goals as the problem of collective action. With different focal points they examine the way in which new political actors are constructed and how they gain political influence beside or in open opposition to the established institutionalized power structures. This analytical perspective is not only able to provide explanations for the political success of particular regionalist movements in a more accurate way than the structural or behavioral approaches mentioned before, but also it allows us to gain insight into the concrete political orientation of these political actors as well as into the particular sources of their success. Since the approaches developed in this field of social research primarily look at the multidimensional mobilization process brought about by the movements rather than at the structural grievances, they provide the analytical tools to conceptualize regionalism as

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<sup>1</sup> The most prominent exception is: Gerdes (1985).

continually constituted in action, i.e., as a dynamic phenomenon. Accordingly, regional aspirations and their political goals can be perceived not as something given outright but as the result of concrete social interaction processes.

Situating this thesis' research design on territorial movements in the context of social movement theory means, however, being offered a whole range of conceptual tools for the study of the dynamic of mobilizing collective action. Applying these tools to the case studies thus demands a methodological clarification of how to best study collective action. For this purpose three analytically distinctive levels can be distinguished on which the formation of a regionalist protest movement can conceivably be studied. Pointing to both their specific reach of explanatory power and their intrinsic shortcomings, the research approach applied in this thesis shall be placed within this model<sup>2</sup>.

The following analytical levels are distinguished: a) the micro level of the single actors in the political group; b) the meso-level conceptualizing the collective mobilization of organizational and symbolic resources in the public sphere; c) the macro- or societal level as the socio-political context in which the mobilizing process is conducted. It is on this later level that the constraints and opportunities of mobilizing efforts are located. The figure on the next page schematically illustrates the three related albeit analytically distinct levels of investigation.

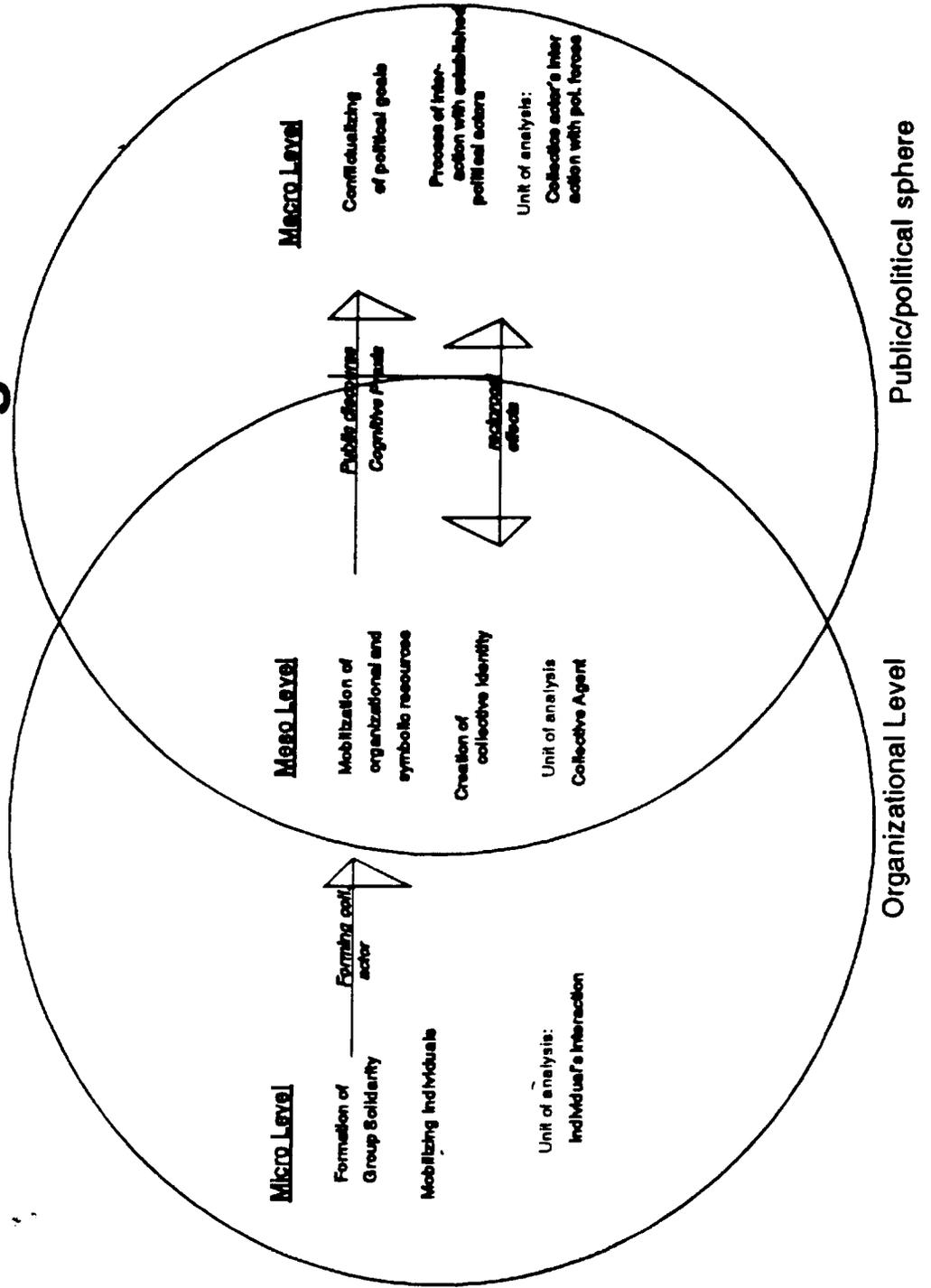
Taking as a starting point the assumption that the focus on individuals' interaction and organizations cannot accurately come to terms with the dynamic formation of a territorially defined collective identity and the mobilization processes generated on the basis of its features, the meso level of research shall be elaborated. The theoretical argument is that it is on this level that the generation of those symbolically mediated action spaces become comprehensible which lie of the core of the formation of consensus. The dynamic of constructing and conflictualizing forms of collective identity on the meso level will be conceived of as being shaped by the 'political opportunities'. Thus, the dynamic interaction between the meso and macro level is of major concern for investigating processes of political mobilization.

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<sup>2</sup> A similar view on research designs can be found in: Eder (1990), Alford & Friedland (1985).

# Levels of Analysis

## Research Design



## 5.2. The Meso-Level: Symbolic Processes in Generating a Mobilizing Dynamic

Revising the dominant analytical approaches in the field of territorial politics, the thesis was formulated that individual-based accounts of mobilization processes on the micro level are too restricted in their analytical scope to adequately grasp the social mechanisms at work in the formation collective action. The endogeneity of preferences is a major problem because theories generated on these grounds do not have conceptual tools for explaining the collective processes in specifying preferences and motivations of the actors. The values and related interests held by individuals, which are taken as the explanatory variable prominently by rational choice approaches, are essentially shaped in socio-cultural processes redefining them and assigning them with political meaning in a constant process of reformulation<sup>3</sup>. Hence, it is inaccurate to take individuals' interaction as the ground on which explanations for political change can be provided. It is only via the intermediate meso level, pointing to intervening processes of social communication, that mobilization processes become comprehensible. Taking into account the inherent limitations of research restricted to the micro-sociological level, the analytical focus employed here will be on studying the primarily social processes in the formation of collective action.

With regard to the type of political actor under investigation this analytical re-orientation becomes necessary because regionalist movements are not aggregated by individuals with fixed preferences and political convictions, nor do they stand as an organizational body for a categorically given political aim. An examination of this level of collective mobilization beyond an individual-centered approach means throwing light on the interactive processes which are taking place within these movements. Regionalist movements are hence taken as socializing agents which collectively reinterpret social reality and thus create a collective identity. These process can, however, only be grasped if they are related to the public discourse in which their respective forms of collective identity seek recognition and their

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<sup>3</sup> Along these lines Eyerman and Jamison have formulated their 'cognitive approach' to social movements. This analytical method focuses on the dynamics within collective actors, studying social movements as processes in constant formation. According to Eyerman and Jamison, social movements have to be "understood and evaluated from inside, according to their goals, intentions, and the new identities and life styles they constitute." (Eyerman/ Jamison 1991:59) Focus on the 'cognitive praxis' performed by these collective actors enables them to study mobilization processes at a level at which social movements perform their crucial politicizing efforts. Much of the success of social movements lies in their convincing attempt to reinterpret social reality with reference to the daily lifeworld experiences of their potential supporters (This finding is in accordance with Habermas' assumption that the protest articulated by social movements today is primarily embedded in the 'grammar of lifeworld experience'). See: Habermas (1981a) and (1981b:Bd.II, 447ff.).

political claims are conflictualized. This means contextualizing the formation of the movement's identity in the broader public realm.

It is not only in this sense that conceptualizing social movements in the framework of a micro approach to collective action - in its older socio-psychological as well as in its rigid rational choice version - is as such of only limited explanatory power. Furthermore, the micro-level of mobilization does not give sufficient information about the 'quality' of conflict articulated by the collective actor. It tends to obscure the critical distinction between any kind of social action - such as occasional forms of violence and protest - and a social movement as a political actor with a relatively stable political project<sup>4</sup>. Social movements are characterized by a certain degree of continuity in the social change they seek to promote and the political action they perform. Some scholars define the distinct character of social movements with regard to the action forms chosen<sup>5</sup>, others with regard to the kind of social change they are striving for. With respect to the political conflict they express, Melucci, for example, argues that social movements are engaged in social conflicts on a 'systemic level' in which the limits of compatibility of the existing systems are threatened<sup>6</sup>. In their symbolic and political practices these political actors express and legitimize a manifest collective identity and give rise to a distinct social conflict. Accordingly, Diani defines social movements as

consisting in networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political and/or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity. (Diani 1992a:3)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pizzorno (1978), Ross (1980), Eder, Tourraine, Diani, Melucci (1982; 1985; 1988), Turner/Killian 1987

<sup>5</sup> Brand et al. draw attention to the crucial role of 'communal action' in social movements. Brand/Büsser/Rucht (1983).

<sup>6</sup> See: Melucci (1984; 1985) and also: Offe (1985).

<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in his definition Kriesi emphasizes the 'challenge' social movements represent to 'normal politics': "I consider a social movement to be an organized, sustained, self-conscious challenge to existing authorities on behalf of constituencies whose goals are not effectively taken into account by these authorities. Such a challenge is constituted by a series of collective actions organized by the organizational infrastructure of the movement. This series consists of individual events which are typically organized around into clusters to be called 'action campaigns'. Each campaign is spatially and temporarily limited. The totality of the action campaigns concerned with a particular challenge makes up the movement. To the extent that there is a degree of coherence and continuity to the challenge, it is secured by the organizational infrastructure of the movement." (Kriesi 1992: 22)

Thus, what is at stake at this 'meso' level of analysis is the problem of identifying the social processes through which social movements are able to mobilize people beyond an immediate interaction contexts and under which political conditions this persistent formation of protest behavior becomes feasible. Mobilization is understood here as a comparatively constant change in the political preference structure of a social group by a systematic use of the resources available to a collective actor<sup>8</sup>.

Regarding the performance of the collective actor itself the mobilization on this level denotes the coordination of single groups and forms of collective action which go beyond the arrangement of an individual's actions in face-to-face settings. To become politically relevant beyond a local context a broader consensus must be formed and the action of single units of a political movement coherently organized. Gerhards and Rucht define the functions of these meso-mobilization contexts accordingly:

First, they provide a structural integration by organizationally connecting groups with each other, collecting resources, preparing protest activities and doing public relations. Second, they aim at an ideological integration of the various groups and networks in developing a common frame of meaning. This serves to interpret the issue at stake and to link the specific concerns to the issue. (Gerhards & Rucht 1991:2-3; emphasis in text)

To examine socio-cultural changes as conducive to the formation of protest movements includes expanding the analysis of collective action beyond the exclusive strategic viewpoint dominant in the resource-mobilization perspective<sup>9</sup>. Besides the mobilization processes at the organizational level, recent work on social movements is increasingly concerned with the set of beliefs and the sense of belonging as a crucial unifying force in the formation of stable

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<sup>8</sup> This concept of mobilization is more extensively developed by Raschke (1985: 187-269).

<sup>9</sup> The resource mobilization approach focuses primarily on the organizational capacities social movements have at their disposal. It takes the existence of social grievances and public discontent as constantly given and pays attention primarily to the activity of often professional agencies working within the social movement (these are labeled social movement organizations or SMOs; see: McCarthy & Zald (1977). In short, in its model the resource mobilization approach "provides an integrated theory of how organizations are formed, public support is mobilized and organizational behavior developed, and political tactics decided." (Dalton et al. 1990:9) To judge the likelihood of "preferences being translated into collective action" (Zald & McCarthy 1987:20) preexisting organizations are needed to integrate those segments of the population into a social movement that might share their political aims ('recruitment networks'). The focal point of this approach consequently rests on the organizational processes within the social movement as well as in the 'social movement sector'. Accordingly, the likelihood that new social movements will emerge is said to be dependent on the "amount of discretionary resources of mass and elite politics" as well as on the organizational and symbolic "resources available to the social movement sector" (McCarthy & Zald 1977:1224-25). Thus, this theory emphasizes the continuity between movement and institutionalized actions engaged in successfully organizing participation, and thereby social change.

protest behavior. Successful mobilization presupposes a strong pre-political consensus with a set of shared beliefs and a feeling of 'togetherness'. Diani speaks of a "growing concern for the interactive processes of symbolic mediation which support an individual's commitment." (Diani 1992a:8)<sup>10</sup> This symbolic struggle is part of the movement's attempt to build up a stable identity, which provides a collective actor with defined boundaries and coherent political goals. In particular, regionalist movements, which are not characterized by historical patterns of a mostly language-based identity and which thus have to build their identity on distinct cultural features, are constantly involved in emphasizing the boundaries and specific features by which their own community is said to be defined. As Cohen points out,

the process of the creation of identity occurs through collective interaction itself, within and between groups. ... Contemporary collective actors see,..., that the creation of identity involves social contestation around the reinterpretation of norms, the creation of new meanings, and a challenge to the social construction of the very boundaries between public, private, and political domains of action. (Cohen 1985:692, 694)

This activity of the regionalist movements will be studied as the symbolic consensus mobilization<sup>11</sup>. The engagement of social movements in expressive forms of action is the decisive medium through which they create this indispensable unifying element. Conceptualized as essentially shaped by social processes the formation of collective identity becomes an object for empirical research. The particular logic of symbolically constructing collective identities on particular codes, its strategic use in spurring political mobilization and its relation to the collective actor's strategic orientations in politics will be of central importance for examining the case studies.

Granted that, as Tilly argues, symbolism is a stable feature of social movements, the concept of symbolism needs some clarification. Ultimately most collective action is symbolic. Collective action must rely on symbols, since they provide the core of a political discourse that shapes the solidarity in a movement even if the people engaged in it never meet. Symbols instigate social action; they help to build solidarity and to create political legitimacy by decisively shaping the political understanding of the movement's followers. It is through these socially shaped cognitive interpretations of reality that issues are perceived and conflictualized in a way conducive to political mobilization. Symbols make power visible by challenging the

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<sup>10</sup> See also: Snow/ Benford (1988).

<sup>11</sup> In this context, it is noteworthy that in the political practice of these actors the simultaneous use of the symbolic and organizational resources often turns out to be conflictual, if not mutually exclusive.

dominant cultural codes. It is very unlikely that people engage in protest movements without cognitively and emotionally identifying with generally-held values and without sharing a framework of common view on social reality. These expressive forms do not merely have the function of achieving concrete political goals. Rather, in the formative stage of the protest movement they are designed to make the collective actor identifiable for the audience<sup>12</sup>. By them these collective actors gain internal cohesion and external reputation. Thus, substantive, concrete and purposive claims coexist with a - preceding - expressive protest. As Pizzorno writes:

Conflicts tend to become ends in themselves (and in extreme cases, it can happen that no specific demands are presented) and do not depend on the process of negotiation, because the real goal that is sought is the recognition of the group's new identity, which is not negotiable for it constitutes the premise of negotiation. (Pizzorno 1978:284)

Marches, public meetings and assemblies are the most effective means of spreading the image and the political goals of the new collective actor. For instance, a march is a display of the people; their physical presence stands for their motivation and their number points to the "right" that a large group of people has by virtue of their consensus. As Tilly notes, it borrows legitimacy from the electoral process, which is also based on the strength of numbers. Similarly a flag expresses the sacredness, independence and power of states, etc. Symbolism has always been used by social movements; when a theatrical repertoire is described as symbolic, what is meant is the novelty of the symbols employed, their numbers and frequency of usage, but also their meaning.

It will be argued that the meaning of symbols is established on the one hand in relation to the cultural contents which they are meant to express, and on the other hand in relation to the situation in which they are employed. Situational factors include the expected reaction of other activists, onlookers, the authorities and the press. Here lies the strategic aspect of theatrical action. It will be shown that new collective actors have utilized the lesson learned by recent movements, the 'new' movements of the eighties. It adopted prolific symbolism to stimulate identity formation, and used theatrical symbolism extensively in protest situations in order to maximize visibility in public discourse.

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<sup>12</sup> As Sahlins elaborates: "A growing reliance upon political imagery suggests that the ability of electoral politics to continue giving meaning depends on political identities where people make these symbolically, or imagine their future through symbols." (Sahlins 1976:127)

### 5.2.1. The Interaction Between the Meso and the Macro Level

Drawing attention to communicative processes in the public sphere means conceptualizing the interaction between the meso and the macro level. In their mobilizing efforts collective actors face opportunities and constraints which limit the chance for their framing of reality to find resonance amongst a wider public. In order to mobilize relevant segments of the population for their political goals social movements are dependent on gaining influence over the public agenda and opinion. This involves a whole range of symbolic actions as well as - decisive in 'information society'- a widespread presence in the mass media. Through symbolic staging in public discourse collective identity is constituted and reproduced and the issues raised by this actor become meaningfully politicized. In order to become politically significant the potent new actor has to engage in the struggle over the rare good of public awareness and the capacity to gain defining power on an issue. In modern society these symbolic fights are unavoidably carried out in the mass media<sup>13</sup>. It is through such an approach of the communicative-symbolic source of power that one can demonstrate how new political actors are constituted and in which way they perform their mobilizing efforts. As shall be shown in the case studies this intensified dependance on mediated social communication in mobilization efforts has opened new opportunities for territorial politics as it has substantially changed the forms of generating collective identity.

Regarding this question, scholars have only very recently come to see media-based visibility as an essential condition of success of the movements. Being mostly restricted to the aspect of the actual participation, the literature on social movements has so far barely been studied systematically the question of how a movement's organizations propagate its goals and beliefs. Social movements do not merely passively present their ideas to the supposedly prestructured public sphere. Rather, they are engaged in essentially shaping public opinion and hence the wider socio-cultural and political environment in which they conduct their mobilizing efforts. Along these lines Klanderman describes the need for a better formulation of this aspect more adequately as a research question:

In the literature on social protest, the insight is winning ground that one's interpretations, rather than reality itself, guide political action. ... Interpreting grievances and raising expectations of success are the core of the social construction of protest. (Klandermans 1989: 121-22)

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<sup>13</sup> See on the role of the media in determining the formation of political protest and conflict the pioneering work of Gitlin (1980). More particularly on the role of mass media in the formation of a national identity see: Collins (1991) and Schlesinger (1991).

Therefore, attention has to be given to the interaction between the social movement's cognitive practice in framing of reality and the public sphere. Social movements cannot be exclusively perceived as closed, 'self-referential' systems which are solely occupied with securing their inner mobilizing dynamic<sup>14</sup>. They direct their claims toward a broader audience and they are themselves substantially shaped in their political activity by the reaction of these addressees. As Schlesinger points out, an organizational level of analysis in itself does not offer a fruitful vantage point for examining how large cultural collective actors constitute their identities (Schlesinger 1987:233). This analytical level is no longer restricted to empirical research on the level of organizations and the set of interactive processes relevant to the internal operation of social movements, and draws attention to changes in power relations and opportunity structures. To establish a lasting protest movement collective action has to react to prevailing structural conflicts in society and challenge traditional political forces. As Tarrow argues:

Although there is continuing reason to distinguish between the internal logic of social movements and that of conventional political groups, the dynamics of collective action - even in its most 'expressive' and anti-political forms - are best understood in relation to the political process. (Tarrow 1988:422)<sup>15</sup>

It is necessary to be aware of the essential goal of social movements to change those cultural patterns according to which society normatively organizes its reproductive structures<sup>16</sup>. What they seek to bring about is the establishment of a counter discourse in the public sphere aimed at raising conflictual issues. The question, which thus arises, is how these movements affect the political system and in which way they are able to shape public discussion according to the issues they raise.

Conceptualizing the interplay between the meso and the macro level the methodological problem emerges of how to measure whether the public reacts sensitively and - in a second step - responsively to the activity of the movements. The single actor is part of an interpretative context in which he reacts upon public issues and becomes politically active. How and under which conditions does it become possible for territorial movements to present

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<sup>14</sup> See for such an interpretation from the viewpoint of the system theory: Ahlemeyer (1989).

<sup>15</sup> See also Klandermans: "Since we believe that mobilization into action is constrained by the necessity to mobilize consensus and gain allies and legitimacy, the political and cultural context in which movements operate are crucial to understanding their strategies, their successes and their failures." (Klandermans, 1988:23).

<sup>16</sup> This is - embedded in a reformulated class theory - stated by Tourraine (1983).

the core-periphery conflict as the dominant controversy in society? Instead of taking it for granted it becomes necessary to show empirically the ways in which interpretative schemes of grievances are generated and diffused<sup>17</sup>.

The research program formulated in the frame analysis described in Snow and Benford<sup>18</sup> is best suited to a conceptualization of this politically highly relevant dimension of the engagement of the social movement. It sheds light on those processes in public discourse<sup>19</sup> through which the perception of social reality is shaped. This concerns the relation between the individual's interpretative framework and that of the social movement's organizations (facilitating consensus) as well as the respective linkage between the collective actor and a broader audience.

The term 'frame' (and framework) is borrowed from Goffman to denote 'schemata of interpretations' that enable individuals 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' occurrences with their life space and the world at large. By rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action whether individual or collective. (Snow et al. 1986:464)

This level of mobilization and the dynamic of political conflict it creates is beyond what the collective agents can create autonomously. The framing and mobilization efforts of social movements are part of an ongoing societal communication process essential for the development of public opinion. The degree of resonance a framing device is able to obtain on the part of potential constituents is dependent on many factors. Therefore, it is necessary to locate regionalist movements in the broader context of national politics.

In this respect one has to consider that the mobilization efforts of territorial movements are essentially shaped by the response of the nationally aligned political establishment. The form of regional protest, the strategic moves of the political actors as well as the likelihood for the lasting success of these political forces essentially rely on interaction with the national

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<sup>17</sup> The concrete material for empirical research here is straightforward. To study the political discourse of an actor it is necessary to apply the range of research techniques developed in content analysis: this means looking at books, journals and newspapers, political discourses, radio and television material, films, slogans, manifests, photographs, music, all that is designed to communicate ideas and interpretations of reality aiming at informing and convincing the public.

<sup>18</sup> See: Snow/ Benford (1988). The concept of framing or frames is based on the analytical concept developed by E. Goffman. He focuses in his study not so much on the social structures themselves but on the organization of the experience of daily social life. He offers an analytical framework which allows us to study individual action in the context of the socially shaped frames. See: Goffman (1974).

<sup>19</sup> See on a discussion of the research in the wider field of public discourse: Donati 1992.

political forces. One determinant of the movement's political platform is whether the given political system and structures of domination allow the regional movements the option of 'voice', acting within the bonds of these structures, or whether they are forced to choose the 'exit' option, i.e. a politics of strict autonomy beyond the existing national political system<sup>20</sup>. Other 'external' circumstances also shape the political success of these actors. As will be demonstrated in the case studies, unpredictable events or changes in the general political environment may have a crucial impact on the mobilization efforts of territorial movements. Since the declared objective of this thesis is to explain macro-sociological change by systematically linking it back to the dynamic generated at a meso level by collective actors, its impact on the institutional setting in which these actors conduct their mobilizing efforts must be examined in more detail. The political change provoked by these actors is critically dependent on how far they are able to successfully challenge the institutionalized configuration of power structures. In order to effectively engage in public discourse new collective actors in particular are dependent on the political and social power that regulates access to publicly relevant positions. Discursive practices and the symbolic fight over the notion of a legitimate social order is intimately and mutually linked to power struggles over the necessary resources for this conflict.

Such an approach to cultural production is fruitful in so far as it adequately conceptualizes the relation between the collective actor's cultural product, the framing device, and the institutional context in which this activity is located<sup>21</sup>. Only by examining the relationship of cultural producers with other socially relevant groups, first of all the state and political elites, does it become possible to understand the dynamic features of cultural

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<sup>20</sup> See with regard to the mentioned theoretical model of Hirschman and its use in the analysis of center-periphery relations: Rokkan (1974).

<sup>21</sup> In the field of cultural studies, Wuthnow sees an increasing bifurcation in the study of cultural change between purely theoretical and more historical or empirical approaches. He speaks about the 'disjuncture of theory and history', pointing to the fact that much of the interest in cultural change among sociologists appears to have moved to in the direction of abstract, normative, or reconstructive models which have lost connection with historical analysis (Wuthnow 1992). He has pointed to this procedural character of a research design which comes to terms with cultural production and its relationship to social action: "Finally the idea of "action sequences" highlights the fact that even within the institutional context the production of culture is a process. Among these questions encountered in examining this process are questions about agency, the activities of cultural producers, their responses to crisis and other contingencies, and the manner in which their responses are limited by the institutional structures in which these responses take place. By bringing questions of cultural change to the level of specificity, investigations can also focus on the ways in which different ideological formulations compete with one another, how social relations are imbedded in the "text" produced, and how these texts are mirrored in the social action they ensue." (Wuthnow 1992:275)

production and the changing features in the process of its politicization. The reaction of established elites and the gradual adoption of institutional resources on the part of the new actor have significant repercussions on the form and content of the issue in question. The effective discourse on identity concerns and the formation of political mobilization reacts to and is shaped by the, albeit changing parameter set by institutionalized power structures<sup>22</sup>. The dynamics generated in symbolically constructing a collective identity at the meso level and the change in the political opportunity structure are perceived as mutually dependent processes.

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To summarize this examination of the meso level: my analytical focal point rests upon the interaction between the macro and the meso-level, the latter delineating the cognitive and organizational practice of the collective actor. Particular attention is given to those symbolic processes by which consensus for collective action is formed. In order to contextualize these processes the resultant research scheme is designed to analyze how social movements interact with the political system and by which they seek to intervene with public discourse. The practices at this level ultimately decide whether regionalist movements are politically successful in diffusing their political framing, i.e. in the present case, the conflict between core and periphery, and in provoking substantial changes in national politics. The mechanisms involved lead to the establishment of a counter-discourse in the public realm, a conflictualization of new issues, and the instigation of political mobilization processes.

It has been pointed out that in order to properly grasp the particular quality of territorial politics and its concrete formation it is necessary to conceptualize these movements as macro-actors on a societal level. It is by shedding light on the interaction between the meso and macro level of analysis that the dynamic of its political mobilization can be understood (See Figure on p. 112). Symbolic resources are mobilized in the public sphere to generate a binding territorially framed identity and to conflictualize related issues. Therefore, the particular dynamic in the socio-cultural field, which shapes mobilizing processes, has to be analyzed in its dynamic features. As a key concept in addressing the mobilizing processes the notion of collective identity will be developed. In the following section this notion is elaborated as a critical conceptual tool for an accurate research design for territorial politics.

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<sup>22</sup> This aspect will be conceptualized by referring to Tarrow's concept of 'political opportunity structures' which will be introduced and applied to the Italian case in Chapter VI.

The concept of collective identity shall be introduced as the 'missing link' which allows us to address the dynamic in the formation of collective action on the meso level as a structuring principle of political change on the macro level.

### **5.3. Reconceptualizing Collective Action in a 'Social-Cultural Space': the Concept of Collective Identity**

When discussing major methodological problems in the relevant field of study, it was claimed that it is necessary to develop research techniques which allow an action-theoretical perspective on political change on the macro level and, conversely, the structuration of concrete social interaction. The following more explicit reference to and elaboration of the analytical key concept 'collective identity' is designed to meet some of the weaknesses described in the first two sections of the methodological part and to provide a suitable research design for my case studies.

In conceptualizing the notion of collective identity for purposes of empirical research, I shall depart from a sociological perspective for which the defining mark of a region is not the territorial unit with its distinct features, but the result of social processes through which the 'region' becomes identifiable as an entity characterized by distinctive cultural and social patterns. Along these lines I have abstracted from 'essentialist' ethnic or national patterns as supposedly explanatory variables (indigenous national history, primordial roots, national or regional communities portrayed as containing the immortal essence of the 'people') and treated them as socially constituted features in an ongoing bargaining process. What has thus to be explained is political mobilization in the regions along the lines of a particular territorial identity. It is fundamental to see how the form of social organization and the cultural and cognitive praxis are crucial in giving a common territorial reference a meaningful image to which loyalties and political claims can be directed. This means light must be shed on the socio-cultural context in which these collective actors produce and reproduce themselves<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> In this context it is important to note that my conceptualizing of cultural features goes beyond the traditional framework established by the older political culture study by Almond and Verba. The latter in fact never developed adequate analytical tools to come to terms with collective action. It proved unable to develop concepts to show how values and mentalities amongst individuals are related to political meaning around which collective actors mobilize people. In a theoretically rather naive way individual values were interpreted as stable variables explaining features of political (in-) stability.

### 5.3.1. Cultural and Symbolic Fights in Constructing a Collective Identity

A collective identity is taken as a commonly shared and persistent consciousness of belonging to and identification with a group and its dominant values. In contrast to social identities, collective identities are defined by an action-oriented dimension in their mode of creating a sense of communal belonging (Bader 1991). In this perspective, collective identity is perceived as a crucial constituent in generating consensus amongst individuals. In applying the notion of collective identity to the form of collective action under investigation the basic assumption is made that every form of territorial politics needs such a strong pre-political consensus. A common interest as such is not sufficient to form this consensus and to instigate processes of political mobilization<sup>24</sup>. Rather, the formation of a collective identity is taken as the critical medium by which commonness is created, an action perspective developed and interests formulated and conflictualized. The importance of a collective identity in forming consensus for political mobilization can be identified in two main aspects. First, the generation of a collective identity is the decisive element in fabricating homogeneity amongst the constituency amongst the members of a collective actor. This entails the aspect of solidarity and the development of a commonly shared frame of reference and belief system. This homogeneity is constructed on the basis of cognitive codes by which a collective identity marks the defining features of the distinction between We and the Non-We. Second, the construction of a collective identity assures continuity. Comparable to forms of individual identity collective identities guarantee a decisive degree of permanence in a continuously changing environment.

Seen from a collective action perspective it becomes possible to study territorial movements as highly dynamic formations of protest behavior that develop their political identity in the course of mobilization. In these processes, collective identity as the integrating feature of a political actor can be seen as the cornerstone of politicizing processes<sup>25</sup>. To

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<sup>24</sup> Eder speaks in this context of the 'creative aspect of collective action' pointing exactly to this aspect of a dynamic reorganization of social structures and interest configuration in the course of political action (Eder 1993a).

<sup>25</sup> Referring to an identity based political approach I refer to Kaufman's definition of 'identity politics': "Identity politics expresses the principle that identity - be it individual or collective - should be central to both the vision and practice of radical politics. It implies not only organizing around shared identities, as for example classic nationalist movements have done. Identity politics also expresses the belief that identity itself - its elaboration, expression, or affirmation - is and should be a fundamental focus of political work." (Kaufman 1990:67)

generate a collective identity means to attribute certain qualities to a social group and thereby to equip its members with a strong feeling of group belonging and of shared interests. It is this sense of a commonly held view on reality and shared values that directs the individuals' loyalties and motivates them to become active on behalf of the particular group. Collective identities constitute strong incentives as a solution to the free-rider problem<sup>26</sup>. The incentives for the individual's engagement are thus decisively dependent on a social process in the course of which a stable collective identity is formed and, consecutively, consensus on politically controversial issues is mobilized<sup>27</sup>. Generating feelings of belonging and commonality is as such a highly important constituent in the mobilization effort of social movements (Giesen 1986).

In order to become influential in political mobilization such a notion of collective identity has to be general and specific at the same time. On the one hand, the collective identity has to be broad enough to include to the vast majority of the potential constituency. It has to provide a common basis for integration into the assigned community, regardless of the actually existing internal social and political differentiations of the movement's potential supporters. On the other hand, there is a pertinent need to define the claims and aspirations of the overarching collective identity in such a way as to give suitable incentives for political mobilization. The political rationale of a particular collective identity has to be specified and symbolically communicated to such a degree that the mobilizing effort becomes credible and pressing.

In accordance with such an approach to territorial politics this thesis focuses on these social and political processes through which an 'ethnic' identity becomes meaningful, and ignores any 'essentialist' approaches (protest based on primordial features<sup>28</sup>). Collective identity is accordingly seen, regardless of its actual political content, as an important

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<sup>26</sup> Friedman and McAdam (1992) have made an interesting attempt to incorporate the notion of collective identity into a rational choice model by looking at SMs' networks.

<sup>27</sup> It is exactly this point that the individual based rational choice approach misses. Although this approach recognizes the need to introduce value orientations beyond mere individualistic cost-benefit calculations, with its limited micro-sociological account it is not able to adequately conceptualize the collective mobilization of consent. It can not answer the question as to why some political issues are able to motivate individual's participation and why these conflicts become salient in public discourse.

<sup>28</sup> Even if approaches to ethnicity or regionalism do not depart from a notion of a constant and non-historic community, they most often take a (albeit hidden) preexisting ethnic identity as a precondition of political mobilization.

determinant of social action<sup>29</sup>. According to Melucci this collective identity can be described as follows:

Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientation of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place.. Collective identity formation is a delicate process and requires continual investment. As it comes to resemble more institutionalized forms of social action, collective identity may crystallize into organizational forms, a system of formal rules, and patterns of leadership. (Melucci 1989: 34/35; Melucci 1988, Tourraine 1985)

For Melucci these 'collective identities' can be seen as an emergent feature of collective action'(181). This means that they have to be conceived of and analytically treated, not as a prior condition of this action, but rather as a continually constituted and reconstructed category<sup>30</sup>. Collective identity is formed in an ongoing interaction process in which social groups come to recognize themselves as collective actors forming their political will around certain key issues in public discourse (Tourraine 1981). As Schlesinger states: " to talk of collective identity requires the continuous action of an agent within a determinate set of social relations."<sup>31</sup>. Collectives identities hence can not be perceived as structurally determined but rather as constructed by the dynamic in the socio-cultural field.

This aspect of generating a binding collective identity is particularly critical for territorial movements. Their political claims are embedded in and legitimized by this reference to a distinct community separated from the outer world by identifiable features. The construction of meaning is a crucial part in the mobilization of territorially based protest, its reproduction and stability. Regardless of achieving certain political goals a strong sense of the 'We' is able to create a culturally confirmed loyalty and commitment of the supporters. It is against this background that Pizzorno classifies collective identity as the precondition for political mobilization, as the 'condition for calculation of the costs and benefits of collective action' (Pizzorno, 1986). It is on the basis of emerging collective identities that new interests are

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<sup>29</sup> For the question of how to further operationalize the aspect of cultural or collective identity in social research and how to link this concept to the structural location of actors in society see: Therborn (1991).

<sup>30</sup> As Calhoun accurately states: "Identity is not a static, preexisting condition that can be seen as exerting a causal influence on collective action; at both personal and collective levels, it is a changeable product of collective action." (Calhoun (1991: 59)

<sup>31</sup> Schlesinger (1991). Along these lines Turner identifies six different conceptual rubrics for an adequate understanding of interaction and structuration processes which underlie the formation of collective action ('categorization, regionalisation, normatization, ritualization, routinization, stabilization of resource transfers') (Turner, *ibid.*, p.150ff).

formulated, related grievances politicized and mass support mobilized. In order to become a significant political agent it is crucial for collective actors to symbolically present their distinct social and political identity and, in doing so, to become identifiable as serious actors competing for ideological credibility and material resources. This holds especially in those cases where collective action is at the initial stage of gaining more explicit organizational structure and where the (public) identification of the political actor is crucial for its mobilization efforts. As Pizzorno states in another context:

"... the process of identification is considered to precede and encompass the process of definition of interest and also to constitute a goal in itself when either no collective identity exists or the old ones are weakening." (Pizzorno 1981b:280)<sup>32</sup>

Although it does accurately identify the crucial role of the formation of collective identity in political conflict, it seems useful to reframe this definition in such a way that collective identity is seen not only as a constitutive element in political conflict. Notwithstanding that it is in this sense a structuring factor, collective identity itself is essentially subject to the political conflict which it launches. Partially modifying Pizzorno's theory of collective identity as a constitutive feature in collective action, it shall hence be also focused on the more instrumental role of these features of community construction in collective action and political conflict<sup>33</sup>. As will be shown by the Italian case studies, features of collective identity can not simply be analytically treated as a prior 'condition for collective action' as implicitly suggested by Pizzorno. Equally, these elements change substantially in the course of the politicizing process, corresponding to the strategic needs the collective actor faces in

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<sup>32</sup> Regarding the role of collective identity in political mobilization Pizzorno (1981b) states: "Collective political action is not a way of maximizing individual utilities according to preexisting interests, but, rather, is an end in itself; in other words, it tends to maximize the values of membership and solidarity." (252). Here the main point is that considerations of collective identity and ideology go beyond an analytical framework established by a utilitarian resource mobilization perspective. This later perspective on political mobilization presupposes the existence of a collective identity without, however, being able to show how it is constructed in collective processes. A strict utility- and strategy-oriented approach analytically negates just this differentiation between individual and socially generated interests.

<sup>33</sup> In this respect I doubt the clear-cut distinction between the 'identity-oriented' and the 'strategy-oriented' paradigm made by Cohen (1985). Collective identity can in fact be seen as a critical resource in political conflict without reducing it its strategic aspects. It is in this later sense that the changes and adaptations in its formulation become comprehensible.

politics<sup>34</sup>. Thus, the construction of a collectively shared identity is not primarily interpreted as a prelude to politics, but as an integral part of the political mobilization itself. It is not the given stability and coherence of the particular form of collective identity which makes it politically meaningful, but its effective reproduction and redefinition according to the changing lines of political conflict. This notion suggests that in political fighting the symbolic repertoire of a collective actor does not have to be consistent. Rather, it can be characterized by contradictory elements that are guided by considerations of political expedience.

Collective identity is hence first of all conceptualized under the aspect of its strategic use in political conflict. This does not mean following a rational choice approach according to which the affiliation to such a collective feature would be an individual's decision taken on the ground of a cost-benefit weighing. The intention is not to advance an interpretation which tends to see cultural features merely as a technique for promoting the benefits of individuals or groups in a rational game, because this would disregard the object of analysis, i.e.,: the socially constructed meaning of issues and actors<sup>35</sup>. Such an approach is similarly immune against the tendency in (European) Social Movement Research to take collective identity as an important, but non-empirical object largely outside the scope of sociological investigation. This school has seen it under an abstract philosophical tradition rather than as a critical component in the movement's praxis itself.

In contrast, the approach developed here suggests a conceptualization of culture - generally understood as a category by which consciousness and knowledge is organized - as a structuring principle in social practice. One step towards such an interpretation is Swidler's notion of culture as 'tool kit',- even if the term itself seems to suggest a reduction of culture to its instrumental use. In fact this concept operates on the assumption that cultural patterns have a constitutive meaning in social conflict in that they provide those resources by which social action is reproduced and reorganized. Swidler describes her concept of culture as a tool kit as a three step analysis:

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<sup>34</sup> As shall be theoretically developed, confirmed by the findings of the case studies: forms of collective identity are integrated in different ways which sets the range within which such features can become subject to qualitative change.

<sup>35</sup> See for this discussion Chapter 3 in March/ Olsen (1984) (Interpretation and the Institutionalization of Meaning). Here, rational choice is portrayed as one approach which, with its static research design, cannot come to terms with the problem of the 'endogeneity of preferences'.

First, it offers an image of culture as tool kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems. Second, to analyze culture's causal effects, it focuses on "strategies of action", persistent ways of ordering action through time. Third, it sees culture's causal significance not in defining ends of action, but in providing cultural components that are used to construct strategies of action. (Swidler 1986:273)

Swidler's conceptualization of culture provides especially fruitful insight into periods of social transformation in which lines of political conflicts are reorganized and new political actors enter the scene. Concerning my interest in new forms of territorial politics such as the Lega, it is striking that its political action can not be adequately grasped by focusing on the structural patterns that shape its engagement. Rather, an emergence of a territorial movement based on an 'imagined community' (Anderson) with a strong sense of collective identity has decisively contributed to redefining social grievances and lines of conflict in Italian society.

Since it is a crucial point in this study to show how the politically relevant reference to the territory is generated and politicized, the symbolic struggle in which the collective actors are engaged will be carefully be examined. By this is meant symbolic and ritual action, ranging from grand political campaigns to rhetoric in text and speeches. Analytical interest is directed toward those strategies by means of which notions of community and coherence with tradition are constructed. The socio-cultural dimension in question accurately pointed out by Wuthnow:

In emphasizing social arrangements, these studies lead away from subjective concerns with the underlying meanings of cultural symbols and focus more on the conditions under which symbols may become meaningful. (Wuthnow & Witten 1988:55)

This means focusing on the exploration of the 'ideological function' of cultural objects not in the sense of generating 'false consciousness', however, but as an embracing system of thought and a political doctrine for mass mobilization. It has to be perceived as socially constructed meaning in the political realm. Along these lines, ideology is to be understood as a 'system of coding reality' (Veron, cited in Hall 1982:71) and hence as the critical medium of political conflict. It denotes the struggle over meaning integral to any form of

political conflict<sup>36</sup>. In research on political mobilization the aspect of ideological features has commonly been dealt with describing the particularities of collective actors. However, in a theoretically satisfying way, ideological elements have seldomly been treated analytically in this context<sup>37</sup>. The fact that collective actors engage in framing reality is normally taken as a given datum rather than being analyzed in its dynamic and constitutive features in the mobilization process. As such ideological elements are not seen in their shaping impact on the character and aims of the movement's mobilization. The particular way of framing reality and constructing collective identity in interaction with the political opponents has constraining influence on the development of a movement's tactic and on the formulation of its political goals and hence on the success of the mobilization effort. In this respect the role of the construction of meaning, of interpreting reality has been systematically underestimated. Ideological elements are generally not conceptualized in an analytical perspective for explaining the patterns of political action<sup>38</sup>. Emphasizing the importance of this point Klandermans states:

In the literature on social protest, the insight is winning ground that one's interpretation, rather than reality itself, guide political actions.. Interpreting grievances and raising expectations of success are the core of the social construction of protest. (Klandermans 1989:119)

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<sup>36</sup> S. Hall has pointed to this aspect of how 'ideology' as a research question can provide valid insight into and explanation of political conflict. Referring to public discourse based ideological framing he states: "Signification enter into controversial and conflicting social issues as a real and positive social force. The signification of events is part of what has to be struggled over, for it is the means by which collective social understandings are created - and thus the means by which consent for particular outcomes can be effectively mobilized. Ideology, according to this perspective, has not only become a 'material force', to old an old expression - real because it is real in its effects. It has also become a site of struggle (between competing definitions). This means that ideology can no longer be seen as a dependent variable, a mere reflection of a pre-given reality in the mind. Nor are its outcomes predictable by derivation from simple deterministic logic. They depend on the balance of forces in a particular historical conjuncture: on the 'politics of signification'." (Hall 1982: 70)

<sup>37</sup> This deficiency has been thematized in the recent book of Morris and Mueller (1992) who explicitly focus on "how SMs generate and are affected by the construction of meaning, consciousness raising, the manipulation of symbols and collective identities" (IX). They come to the conclusion that in the present literature on collective action the "treatment of ideological factors in relation to the course and character of movements has been far from satisfactory." (135) Along the same lines Morris and Herring (1987) have identified the role of ideology in mobilization processes as a key are of future research. In this context my own research design is meant to go beyond a simple descriptive approach.

<sup>38</sup> This is an acknowledgement of, as for instance in the work of Michel Foucault, the 'materiality of discourse' as a constitutive element in social conflict.

Such a perspective on cultural aspects as being essential in the formation of collective action is evidently formulated as an alternative to those approaches to culture which focus on its subjective value orientation or which engage in an interpretation of its meaning. However, to develop a notion of culture which concentrates on its role in political conflict does not necessarily mean advocating an understanding of culture which treats it merely as a strategic resource in a structured class conflict (elaborated in its probably most extreme form in Althusser's approach and in a more refined way in Gramsci's notion of ideology). Rather, culture is perceived here as a constitutive element of social and political practice, which is able to change substantially the configuration of 'structural' conflicts and power relations<sup>39</sup>. Socio-structural positions shape the field of potential political action by determining the single actor's access to material and symbolic resources, i.e., to the means of gaining political power. However, rather than being stable conditions, these 'class positions' change in the course of social practice and political conflict<sup>40</sup>. The causal link between socio-structural conditions and the concrete form of social action is not a one-sided determining one. Symbolic forms of mediation are decisive in making social grievances the object of political conflict as they shape these 'objective' conditions under which collective actors are formed. It points to the dynamic by which structural grievances and individual opinions are transformed into politically meaningful action. The critical mediator between social actors characterized by particular social features and their attempt to culturally frame certain issues is communication<sup>41</sup>. This means a mostly textually mediated process of struggle over meaning which takes place in the public and which develops a dynamic uncontrollable by single social actors. It is the public realm in which the successful staging of certain political issues is determined.

The significance of such an approach for research is straightforward. Such a constructivist perspective allows the dynamic features of mobilization processes to be studied more appropriately. As Diani and Eyerman accurately observe:

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<sup>39</sup> Such an understanding evidently pre-structures the analytical interest of my investigation. As Cetina/Grathoff put it: "Cultural-sociological approaches take the symbolic and discursive constructedness of social action not only as a side aspect and precondition but put it into the center of their sociological analysis." (1988: 28)

<sup>40</sup> For such an action-oriented approach to class see Bourdieu (1979, 1982, 1985) and particularly his notion of habitus as socially structured principle of social action that is simultaneously a structuring agent.

<sup>41</sup> Here I am indebted to Eder 'Kultur und soziale Integration', unpublished manuscript, EUI 1992).

Viewing values or beliefs as constitutive of action, rather than its precondition, allows one to see action as a social construction. Attention can then turn to the processes of constructing the frames adopted by actors in interpreting their own experience. In conceptualizing the process of 'frame construction' as collective rather than individual, researchers in the field of collective action have turned to the formation of collective identity and to the making of social movements. Rather than ready-made collective actors, social movements are here seen as processes in formation. (Diani & Eyerman 1992: 15)

Relating these theoretical findings to my interest in territorially based movements this thesis departs from the assumption that both class formation and territorially legitimated mobilization are processes of the formation of collective identity and action. Both forms of collective action in this process can be situated in a socially stratified social space as well as the mobilization generated by these two forms of political protest has itself stratifying consequences, changing the configuration of given social power<sup>42</sup>. In turning to the evident differences between the two forms of political mobilization it is obvious that we are confronted with two different modes of generating a collective identity as the basis for their respective political claims.

This perspective on culturally constructed and legitimized social conflict allows the formulation of a notion of culture which becomes a critical reference point in explaining how cultural patterns gain stability and political meaning in their respective social environments. Drawing on a differentiation elaborated by Wuthnow (1987) one can identify an 'institutional' research design in which "culture is regarded not only as a patterned set of elements (as in the structural approach) that expresses something about moral order (as in the dramaturgic approach), but also as a consisting of actors and organizations that require resources, and in turn, influence the distribution of resources." (Wuthnow 1987:15) Again, perceived as such culture is conceptualized as a structuring and explanatory variable in understanding collective action. In this, cultural features are approached reflexively, not "objectivistically" (Calhoun 1994).

It has been claimed that the notion of collective identity can be conceptualized as a critical explanatory link between the meso level and macro political change. For this purpose this concept has to be made fruitful for empirical research. Attention hence has to be given to the concrete way in which collective identity is constructed and reproduced and to the mechanisms with which it shapes political change.

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<sup>42</sup> See for a promising conceptualization in this direction Haller's 'structural approach to social movements' (Haller 1992).

### 5.3.2. Towards a Classification of Forms of Collective Identity

The social construction of boundaries is a decisive element in attributing identifiable features to the community. Assigning the features of the 'in-group' and its socio-political entitlements, the concept of community is built on a categorization of inclusion and exclusion which work simultaneously. By definition, collective identity is a relational concept. Commonness of a certain social group and its difference to others are two sides of the same classification effort. By means of these boundaries the community is equipped with an identity resulting from dividing the population into discrete groups which are alleged to be natural and inevitably distinct. The more these dividing boundaries are naturalized and consecutively conflictualized in public discourse, the more the distinct community can become an object of political aspirations. It allows for processes of social inclusion and exclusion by which the constituency is assigned.

There are, however, different procedures involved in setting the community apart from others thus making it an object of legitimate rights. The specificity of a territorially based political movement consists in the nature of the collective identity by which the community is integrated and endowed with the inevitable sense of stability. This integration is secured by classifying codes which structure the perception of social reality assigning critical importance to the notion of the contested sovereignty in salient political conflicts. The character of such a self-ascribed defining identity - its rigidity or openness - sets the limits within which political strategies can be formulated. The particular codes upon which the collective identity is based provide the political movement with critical resources in mobilizing their assigned constituency. These codes determine the range in which political goals can be conceived and issues politicized without contesting the overall integrating collective identity. Here it is again necessary to underline that the formation of a politicized collective identity is an explicit challenge to the dominant cultural order. Hence, it determines how people locate their claims in an accordingly defined socio-cultural system as well designating the range of targets and tactical means that are seen as legitimate.

This construction of a politically relevant collective identity is, however, never only a matter of a self-referential procedure. Rather, this attempt to assign meaning is deeply dependent on the specific social and political setting with which it interacts. Established political identities and loyalties react to the challenge of the 'new'; they normally have the shaping power of the established institutions on their side. As Giesen states:

In the same way as the meaning of a sentence can only be understood by referring to a situation or a particular environment, the constructions of collective identity, too, take place in particular social situations and these situations are not indifferent to the codes and the modes of collective identity. (Giesen 1993: 10)<sup>43</sup>

What is meant here is more than the evident fact that a collective identity and the corresponding political ideas are never only the result of completely unconditioned efforts of the collective agent itself. Collective identities should be understood as interactively constructed rather than randomly fabricated or structurally determined. The focus is on how these forms of collective identity are formulated in social processes and in which way they are conflictualized with competing ones. In this context Giesen develops a three-pole model for analyzing collective identities in a "macroconstructivist approach" (Giesen), shedding light on the different interacting levels which determine its shape. The first pole is the concrete situation in which the particular collective identity is interpreted while being exposed to the complexity of situational circumstances. The second constituting element of collective identities are processes of interaction, in the course of which the collective actor formulates its own position. This latter factor points to the less spatial restricted procedures of social communication which symbolically contribute to the constant affirmation and redefinition of such a constructed identity. Finally, Giesen identifies the above-mentioned codes as key frames in interpreting social reality as constitutive features in forming collective identity (Giesen 1993a, p.34ff.)<sup>44</sup>

Applying such a dynamic approach to the formation of collective identity it is instructive to analyse each case's specificity regarding the basic codes on the basis of which a sense of homogeneity and belonging is fabricated. In this respect it proves instructive to make use of Giesen's suggestion to differentiate between three ideal types of collective identity, each reflecting some principal features regarding its mechanisms of integration and its relation to the external environment (Giesen 1993a, 1993b; Eder/ Giesen 1994).

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<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Eyerman and Jamison have conceptualized their contextual approach to social movements: "The specific character of national politics has a direct effect on these social movements, including the structure of their organizations and the issues they take up, and indeed their very identity as social movements." (1991: 154)

<sup>44</sup> As Giesen states: "In these processes (modernization, individualization and differentiation/ O.S.) traditional forms of collective identity are demolished and replaced by new features. It is not the pre-given existence of a collective actor that determines a specific collective action whereby the latter being the expression of this concretely existing actor. Rather, it is through this macro-social action, through the extension of social networks and the logic of modern institutions that collective identity is generated. The view is reversed: The process explains the structure, the action constitutes the structure and not the other way around." (Giesen 1993a: 23)

The first of these ideal types is the primordial one (Shils 1975). It is based upon codes and rituals seeking to emphasize the supposedly 'natural givenness' of a territorial community<sup>45</sup>. The claimed uniqueness of its own collectivity defines its relationship with the outer world. In order to protect its internal stability the procedures of crossing the boundaries between the inner and outer dominion have to be strictly formulated and are normally characterized by insurmountable barriers. Primordial forms of collective identity seek to rigorously regulate contact with the outside world to protect the intrinsic value of their culture from pollution or dilution. The integration of the community is secured by exclusory practices built upon a rigid demarkation of the 'We' and the 'Them'. It is coherent with such a community that it is based on an identity which is virtually unattainable for an outsider. In effect, "the relationship of primordial collectivities to their environment is not a missionary one." (Giesen 1993: 5; emphasis in the text). Territorial movements of this type tend to stress the 'ethnic' uniqueness of their respective community by historical narratives and symbolic practices. By doing so, they seek to underline the necessity that birth into their community and the 'natural' acquisition of the indigenous identity is the only valid prerequisite to belonging to the territorially demarcated collectivity. Regarding the socializing mechanisms, Amersfoort describes the crucial element in the formation of a primordial identity as follows:

The crucial element in the primordial tradition is the socialization process by which the individual becomes a member of his cultural group, internalizing its values, and develops sentiments of belonging and security, basic needs for every human being. The 'rites de passage' engage the individual in his culture in a way that can never be fully undone. Normally the individual is hardly aware of this. (Amersfoort 1991:19)

On the part of the individual those features of belonging are perceived as natural and given by birth into the community. The self-presentation of the collective identity refers to unique ethnically framed standards which are incompatible with those who did not go through the socializing 'rites de passage'. In fact, the 'foreigner' is considered to be a genuine threat to the community by its otherness. A critical integrative mechanism of this type of collective identity is the image of being under the constant peril of overpowering outside pressure.

The second type of collective identity is integrated by cultural patterns of identification. The orientations of this way of demarcating the boundaries between the 'we' and the 'them' is potentially universalistic. The virtues that are said to be the defining criteria for belonging

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<sup>45</sup> Anderson also speaks of the critical undertaking of nationalist movements to portray their own community as rooted in a timeless and uncontested history, even if these communities are simply recent inventions.

to the indigenous community are not bound to a strictly defined ethnic criteria or cultural endowments which are categorically given by descent. On the basis of a notion of superiority of the territorially defined community, the often undefined boundaries for foreigners are in principle open as long as he is willing to adapt to the mostly implicit rules of the game. This type of collective identity explicitly invites people to 'convert' by the help of education and cultural assimilation. It is in fact integral to this type of collective identity that it develops a sense of 'missionary attitude', presenting its own societal order as a superior, albeit universally applicable societal model. However, this form of collective identity is characterized by a noteworthy ambivalence regarding its integrating features. Pointing on the one hand to the cultural openness of its boundaries, for legitimating reasons, on the other hand, it still works with an underlying idea of communal homogeneity. On its basis severe practices for cultural assimilation can be formulated and enforced. The belonging to a territorially conceived community, the mode of cultural inclusion, is not made entirely subject to discursively generated and explicitly stipulated civic rights. Rather, it often works with a culturally framed notion of an integrating identity, the standards of which are formulated on implicit rules. The newcomer is asked to submit to accordingly developed rites of initiations whose generation and definition are outside the scope of his influence and in which he cannot participate<sup>46</sup>. The more this cultural type of collective identity is naturalized and rationalized by non-discursive modes of integration, the more the 'rules of obedience' can be enforced vis-à-vis the outsider.

A third type of collective identity is the civic one, the codes of integration of which are distinctly different from the primordial exclusory practices and the cultural form of community building. It is based upon the implicit knowledge about life routines and customs

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<sup>46</sup> In elaborating this analytical model it is important to be aware of the twofold process by which forms of collective identity emerge and are reproduced. Patterns of collective identity are structured through 'grid', classifying schemes, and 'group', defined by the boundaries that mark the dividing line between what belongs to the collectivity and what has to be perceived as external, as alien to it. A shared identity is essentially related to the differentiation of the community from some other people. Regarding the two ideal types a spontaneous impression would be to assume that the primordially based form is naturally based on a more distinct and hence more resolute demarcation from the 'other'. In fact, as the case studies will indicate, an aggressive attitude with racist undertones is not exclusively a disposition to be found in those cases with strict blood-based collective identities. Particularly in their formative stage culturally integrated forms of collective identities use the assertive demarcation from the 'Other' as a primary source for identity building. Since these are to a lesser extent confirmed by a habitual praxis rooted in daily life and more based on the rivalry with competing ones, cultural codes, particularly when being newly propagated, tend to define very contentiously their external relationships. With the 'grid' being structurally weak a sense of the we is 'constructed' via the aggressive demarcation from the 'Non-we'. This question will be addressed in the case studies.

practiced in daily lifeworld and codified in legal texts. Regardless of primordial and cultural endowments, here membership is solely based on "competent participation" in tradition-based civic practice (Eder/ Giesen 1994). Internal rules and procedures are the reference point in constructing communality. The principle of territoriality is treated only as a geographical reference point, whereas the integrating norms for communality patterns are formulated independently from descent. Consequently, outsiders are not perceived as a threat or as inferior beings but, potentially, as equal and competent new members of the community. Of essential significance is in this type of collective identity that, unlike the case of its cultural counterpart, the sense of communal belonging is not primarily generated by the demarcation from the 'Non-We'. On the contrary, the identifying mechanisms are based on internal procedures and rules of societal life<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> This last point will again gain critical importance in the concluding part.

**Figure II: Crucial Elements in Defining Boundaries in primordial, cultural and civic forms of collective identity**

	Primordial collective identity	Cultural collective identity	Civic collective identity
Character of Boundaries	Unsurmountable for outsiders; non-negotiable endowment of indigenous population	Crossable through adaptation and compliance to fluid cultural standards of inclusion	Boundaries constituted by internal procedures not by explicit demarcation from 'Others'
Definition of criteria for potential members	Strict, ultimately ethnically defined standards of belonging; accordingly framed 'objective' criteria of integration	Discursively fabricated consensus based on explicit cultural values; membership subject to flexible cultural attributes	Universalistically framed criteria; membership constituted by implicit rules in civic interaction
Integrating Features	Belonging constituted by birth (blood relationship); Strong sense of distinctive history and ethnic 'uniqueness'	Commonly shared worldviews and cultural values as a reflexive self-interpretation; polemic demarcation from 'Non-We'	Consensually agreed civic rules as established traditions and competent participation in them
Attitude towards the outer world	Rigid demarcation; uniqueness of community; outer relations perceived as threat; no scheme for integrating outsiders	Missionary attitude; 'exportable' model for societal organization; explicitly invites for 'conversion'	Potentially open for everybody; no discriminatory standards on the basis of territorial or ethnic criteria (disregard of descent)
Stability of assigned constituency and its integrating features	By definition stable (historically 'invariant') ethnic standards; constituency designated by descent	Changing according to specific model stipulated by cultural value orientation and ideational reference points	Discursively generated and hence by definition fluid standards of belonging; constituency formed by participation in communal routine
Formulation of political aspirations	Rigid political agenda determined by aim to preserve and enlarge the rights of the ethnically assigned population	Flexible adaptation to changing challenges; normative primacy of territoriality in defining political goals (however, open to different agendas)	Political agenda primarily defined by non-territorial issues; focus on civil and constitutional rights and participatory values of community

This categorization should provide the interpretative tools to come to terms with the dynamic generated by collective action on the macro level. The guiding hypothesis in analyzing the case studies with reference to the above typology is the following: the way in which these ideal-types are integrated by distinct codes sets critical limits on the political goals potentially pursued and the mobilization dynamics originated. Each of these types of collective identity is based on a system of meaning and a corresponding framing of reality that prestructure the respectively generated political conflict. Referring to the three types of collective identity it becomes possible to explain how they react to changes in the macro-social opportunity structure and to identify the determinant factors for the political mobilization generated.

One of the central hypothesis for analyzing the case studies is that the constituting codes of this form of collective identity put severe restrictions on the political options for an accordingly integrated collective actor. The discursive strategies in assigning meaning to the basic codes of the three forms of collective identity substantially differ in terms of the mobilizing dynamic in politics. For instance, a wide range of political goals are feasible for the cultural form of collective identity because of its flexibility in redefining its constitutive boundaries and thus its potential constituency. It is in this respect that territorial politics will be interpreted as a highly dynamic source of political conflict. Its procedures of defining the boundaries and in stabilizing the demarcation to the 'Other' are able to responsively react to the changed conditions under which in modern society collectives identity is constructed. The cultural collective identity is able to flexibly relate to 'identity resources'<sup>48</sup> that are decreasingly rooted in a stable social environment (class-based) and hence available as somewhat 'arbitrary' ascriptive categories for political mobilization. The role of a political actor based on a primordial identity is, on the other hand, far more determined concerning its political aspirations. Given its constitutive codes this type of collective identity is dependent on a legitimating recourse to stable social contexts in order to make its claims credible. On the basis of the rigid demarcation of the assigned community the political discourse built on primordial features is primarily organized around the preservation of the *status quo* of the community.

Drawing attention more closely to political mobilization and how such differentiation can be operationalized in the cases under investigation, it is advisable to distinguish between two

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<sup>48</sup> See on this aspect the theoretical discussion above (chapter 3.3.).

crucial aspects in the mobilization dynamic generated by territorial movements: the instrumentally guided action and that designed to construct a binding collective identity. This corresponds to Giesen's situational and the broader structural context, focusing however more closely on the features of political conflict. The latter component in the mobilization effort of a political organization frames the more stable source of identity. As stated above, it particularly provides the new emerging political force with an indispensable sense of solidarity and stable collectivity. The formulation of a binding collective identity guarantees that the movement will not vanish on the accomplishment of single objectives. Hence, the goals of a collective identity are mostly beyond immediate political disputes. As Pizzorno describes, due to a decreasing attraction of uniform catch-all parties new conflicts emerge in Western societies that are based upon the recognition of identity which is a non-negotiable issue (Pizzorno 1981). Territorial movements are critically built on this politically overarching notion of being radically different from interest-based mass parties. Their integrating collective identity as such expresses a distinct form and content of political aspiration that is portrayed as being incompatible with 'normal politics'. Beyond single political goals the expression and affirmation of identity itself is represented as being the non-negotiable basis for political engagement.

In correspondence to this overarching collective identity concrete goals and strategies have to be developed to generate particular targets in the daily struggle for political power. Evidently the movement's organization has to present these instrumentally guided campaigns and aims in harmony with its binding collective identity. In particular the mobilization of newly emerging collective actors is in this respect characterized by a continual adjustment of its political identity which sets it apart from the established parties into a credible and convincing strategy of concrete political change. It is a successive process of mutual readjustment. As will be shown in the case studies, the regional identity with ethnic undertones and the ever more realistic prospect of a broad political mobilization even on a national level has made it necessary to continuously reformulate the underlying collective identity of this territorially based movement.

The formation and constant reproduction of a collective identity is in this respect to be seen as a cycle of adjustment to the changing environment which starts anew when these forms of collective identities tend to no longer correspond to political experiences and belief systems of the individual. In the phase of stagnation and eventual decline of politicizing effects of the collective identity (often in period of enhanced institutionalization) has to be

redefined (reframed), it needs to be reformulated and re-adjusted to again be able to stabilize political commitment. Here one has to distinguish short term adjustments and long term redefinitions of the collective identity. Whereas the former concerns mostly new mobilizing opportunities in the political system, the latter describe more basic changes within the constituency of a collective actor. For instance, as is particularly true for 'primordial collective identities': through inter-generational change these symbolically mediated constructions tend to lose their credibility and ideological attraction. In this respect, its cultural counterpart is substantially more flexible in adopting new political goals, conflictualizing new issues and mobilizing untapped social groups for its political project.

#### 5.4. Summarizing critical patterns of an analytical model for territorial movements

A research agenda is aimed at which is able to cover structural as well action-theoretical aspects in the formation of political mobilization, perceiving them in their mutual relatedness. The analytical model is designed to integrate the key elements, i.e., those directed towards the processes located on a meso- and macro-level of investigation (See Figure IV, p.112). The main argument here is, that to study newly emerging political actors with some of the distinct characteristics of a social movement and the process of formation of their ideological and political orientation, it is necessary to focus on their cognitive, mainly media based praxis rather than on the level of the individual supporter. In this respect, the advanced analytical approach is distinct from a restricted focus on the internal life of a social movement, or on the mechanisms at work in its organizational network, and is also distinct from a one-sided emphasis on overarching structural changes in Western society as explanatory variables. The focal point of my investigation is rather how on a meso level certain political opportunity structures are used concretely by collective actors in their mobilization effort and how features of mobilization evolve over time<sup>49</sup>.

The rationale of my focus on public discourse, recognizing the "importance and autonomy of the cultural (or ideological) dimension which lies at the basis of collective action" (Donati

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<sup>49</sup> The analytical framework is formulated in way that is designed to bridge the European tradition in social movement research that emphasizes the macro-oriented collective identity approach and the American strategy-oriented approach. The cognitive praxis is the medium which allows one to conceptualize the agent structuring activity by which collective actors

1992:137), rests on a crucial theoretical hypothesis. The cognitive praxis of the collective actors and the resulting structuration of public political discourse is perceived as a decisive element in conditioning the formation of political mobilization. In this respect, the formation of a stable collective identity is understood as the crucial cognitive reference point in the mobilization efforts of new political forces. Particularly for territorially based movements which claim to be the legitimate political advocate of a political community it is decisive to analyze how their politicized collective identity is generated. Constituting boundaries for the assigned community it represents a critical tool for the movement's integration as well as it marks the overarching reference point of its political framing of reality with crucial legitimizing resources. On these grounds the interpretation of reality is conducted, related political issues are conflictualized and strategic aims are formulated. Bearing in mind the conceptual difficulties of this notion, i.e. that is often treated as a highly abstract category in research, collective identity shall be conceptualized as an empirically classifiable feature in political mobilization. A systematic reconstruction of the relationship between the social movement's symbolic practice and the social and political structures is intended where neither of them is taken as a determinant factor. Instead, structural variables and social movements have to be conceptualized as interdependent phenomena subject to change over time. The guiding thesis here is that the features of collective identity, the definition of boundaries and criteria for belonging to the community, are critical incentives and structuring conditions for political mobilization.

My major concern is hence to show the generation of a stable political identity of a territorial movement in relating it to the dynamic interaction with the political system. This is meant to illuminate the significant link for collective action between ideational features, the generation of a collective identity and core discourses in framing political meaning, and "strategic" politics (Gamson 1992, Klandermans 1992).

Thus, the formation and reproduction of a movement's collective identity is, albeit in conflictual terms, intimately related to the interaction in the political sphere. My analytical model is conceptualized to shed analytical light on the multiple interdependence between the construction of a steady collective identity, the concrete political options taken on its ground and the changing political opportunity structure (changes in the political system and in public opinion). Reacting upon a changing political environment these movements face the necessity to constantly reaffirm or, in the case of loss of credibility, redefine their collective identity

and the integrating codes with which it is composed<sup>50</sup>. In such a dynamic model ideological features and political interests are taken as emerging patterns of the cognitive praxis in which the collective agent is engaged.

Given the changing features of the political opportunity structure the analytical interest has to be directed towards the mobilizing efforts of territorial or populist movements in their interaction with the public sphere. The important point here is the political discourse that is defined by Rein as the

interaction of individuals, interest groups, social movements and institutions through which problematic situations are converted to policy problems, agendas are set, decisions are taken. (Rein 1986:1)

Analyzing the political mobilization of the two forms of territorial politics under investigation the focus will hence be on the public domain and the discourse which shapes it. In this context different levels of political mobilization will be looked at, each in a specific interaction with its discursively constructed environment: a. the process of identity formation (cognitive dimension); b. the process of community building (affective dimension)<sup>51</sup>, c. the process of employing means of action (instrumental dimension). The cognitive dimension refers to the above explicated activity of interpreting and framing facts in accordance with the actor's key political goals and mobilizing efforts. The affective dimension denotes the necessity of any successful mobilization to integrate the individual into a common project, be it via notions of solidarity or a shared identity in subcultural milieus. By such a symbolic staging of affective commonness abstract political ideas are translated into personal commitment and action.

As illustrated in Figure IV, the mobilization efforts of protest actors can be seen as a highly interactive and dynamic process. Both the protest actor, originally lacking relevant access to the institutionalized sphere of decision-making, and the established political actors in their political and cognitive practice, aim at influencing public opinion in favor of their political goals. Through their framing of reality and symbolic struggle new agendas and cleavages are set. Critical variables for the mobilization effort of newly emerging actors are,

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<sup>50</sup> For the purpose of this aspect of the research the framing process, understood as schemata of interpretation, with its different elements will be applied. Snow and his associates have developed the concepts of frame bridging, -transformation, -amplification and -extension in order to analytically grasp the reformulation of frames in political conflict (see more detailed discussion in case studies).

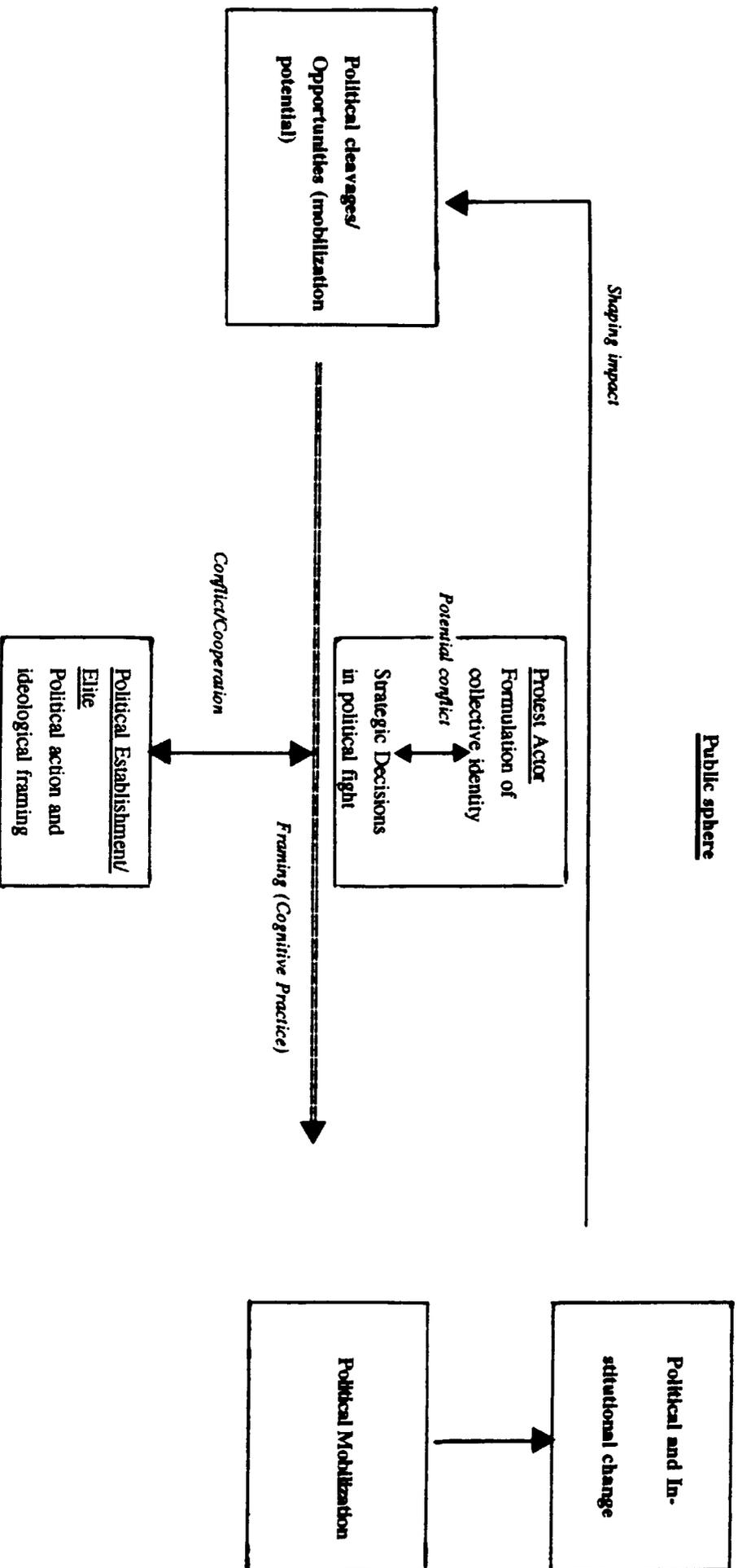
<sup>51</sup> R. Collins (1991) refers in this context to 'emotional production' and 'management of emotions'.

in this context, the resonance in public and relation to established political actors. This in turn reshapes the political opportunities to which these actors react. The features of the mobilization effort, namely the formulation of lasting and politicized collective identity and the more reactive strategic orientation in politics, have to effectively react to these changing political conditions to sustain mobilization.

The findings developed on the grounds of such a dynamic and empirical approach to the formation of collective identity should allow the mobilization effort to be temporalized according to distinct phases. Each phase reflects the opportunities and constraints upon which the movement reacted and how successful it was in responding productively to changes in the political environment (key events, change of strategy of the political opponents). On the basis of such classified features an insight becomes possible into the specific nature of the particular mobilization, the roots of its success and the challenges it has to face in the course of its formation.

On a more general level, the mobilizing dynamic, which should be captured by the analytical model documented below, can be described as follows: collective actors engage in the public sphere in formulating their collective identity and in conflictualizing their related political issues ('cognitive practice'). In this, the resonance on their mobilizing efforts depends on the particular political opportunity structure, the latency of social conflicts and a possible disintegration of the existing configuration of power. In spreading images of collective identity and in establishing a counter discourse these actors unavoidably come into conflict with the established power elite, whose reaction to the political newcomer is another crucial determinant as to whether the new agent is able to establish itself as a serious political agent. The resulting political mobilization has certain consequences on the macro level, changing the political environment in which the collective action is performed. The cognitive practice of the collective agent, its communicative and symbolic engagement in the public sphere, hence can be perceived as a structuring principle in continuously reshaping the political environment in which it conducts its mobilizing efforts. This means to go beyond an analytical perspective restricted to the self-production of the collective agent. The idea behind this model thus is that the generated political mobilization is - evidently to a varying degree - continuously changing the environment in which the collective identity is made a reference point of political conflict. Depending on the performance of the opposing political forces this political agent is to a certain degree a structuring factor, shaping the features of political conflict. Political mobilization is hence perceived as a steady process of the new agent's re-adjustment to the changing surroundings.

Figure IV: Analytical model for studying the dynamic features of political mobilization



## Chapter VI

### Italian Politics: Political Opportunities in a Political System in Crisis

#### 6.1. Introduction: Pillars of Stability in Italian Politics

The aim of this chapter is to illuminate very broadly some major changes in Italian society and politics, against the background of which the mobilization effort of regionalist movements has to be seen. The hypothesis in delineating these 'opportunity structures' is that changes in Italian politics have allowed an actor such as the Lega to successfully establish a counter discourse based on identity concerns. In this respect, it is however not claimed that these broad structural changes can be taken as causal explanations for the rise of a political actor such as the Lega. Nevertheless, they denote those crucial cleavages and features of crisis which have been salient in Italian society and which have found their actualized and politicized expression in the so-called collapse of the 'First Republic'. The quality of crisis in Italian politics defines the margins within which the framing of populist protest actors could find a politically meaningful resonance in public. Populist protest in particular is profoundly formulated in close interaction with the gradual delegitimization of traditional politics. The main focus in this section of my work will be on the wider political setting and 'political opportunity structure' (Tarrow)<sup>1</sup> rather than on the concrete features of the political crisis shaping Italian politics. In the case studies it will be shown how in detail territorial based protest actors used these features as opportunities for their mobilization.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Tarrow developed this concept of the 'political opportunity structure' in mobilization cycles (See Tarrow 1983, 1988b; 1989; McAdam 1982). Mobilizing action reacts upon newly emerging opportunities but it is simultaneously critically involved in shaping these opportunities. Tarrow's concept of 'political opportunity structure' (1983) has originally three, in its later version four dimensions each denoting an aspect of the political system which has crucial influence on the movement's evolution independently of the direct purposive action of the actors involved:

1. degree of openness/closure of formal political access. Political systems differ to the degree to which they allow protest a 'voice' in the context of institutionalized forms of political communication;
2. the degree of stability/ instability of political alignments and bonds (to parties) amongst the population. The loyalties to established political actors are mostly based on integrated socio-cultural milieus which can deteriorate under the impression of short term loss of political credibility or due to more long lasting changes in the socializing environment;
3. the availability and strategic posture of potential alliance /partners for newly emerging political actors.
4. the political conflicts within and among elites.

The concurrence of some of these elements improves a new actor's chance to initiate a new 'mobilization cycle' which puts into question established power structures and corresponding frames of reality. In these cases new political repertoires of political action are applied, new issues enter the public agenda and subsequently the conflict may penetrate into spheres traditionally controlled by the political elite. The Lega's political mobilization will be looked at accordingly.

One critical element in analyzing the 'opportunity structure' to which the Lega has reacted, is the degree of formal access to the state and its decision making process (Kriesi 1991). In this context the First Italian Republic has traditionally been classified as a 'closed state', efficiently denying new political forces or citizens' initiatives a voice in policy. After the Second World War the Italian nation-state has neither been decentralized, permitting new actors access to the regional or local political level, nor has it been characterized by a strong system of checks and balance, imposing a more efficient political control on the executive and allowing for significant influence by non-governmental actors. The astonishing continuity in Italian politics has been due to a specific institutional setting and a political culture both designed to maintain the prevailing configuration of power that has been dominated by the antagonism between the dominant *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) and the Communist Party (PCI, now PDS). The well-known notions of the 'bipolarity without alternation' or 'imperfect two-party system' (Galli) describe this logic of Italian politics.

Although originally designed as a federalized state with some considerable elements of direct democratic access to the policy process, the political system and state bureaucracy were modeled so as to be conducive to protecting the power of the dominating center- conservative block. In the name of anti-communism, the institutional setting of the Italian political system was closed off to outside influence. Effective procedures and mechanisms were established to either successfully integrate or, more likely in the First Republic, to repress the political claims of the challenger. Given the relatively stable distribution of political power until the late 1980s (including the center-left administrations) no new political force was able to effectively challenge the position of the Christian Democrats (DC)-led governments and the opposition represented by the Communists<sup>2</sup>. The result of this system established by the ruling elites was, until recently, very limited action space for new actors within the institutional setting of the political system. As a consequence, in Italy political mobilization has to a large degree traditionally been located outside the realm of party politics, challenging the existing order from an anti-institutional stand with only very limited repercussions on the power structure in Italian politics itself (Tarrow 1988b). The strength and amplitude of unconventional political and terrorist actions in Italy have to be seen against this background.

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<sup>2</sup> Hence it has been crucial that the Lega has explicitly designed its political identity in unmistakable opposition to the institutional setting of the nation-state and its main protagonists.

In advancing an interpretive framework for the eventual and astonishingly rapid disintegration of this system, and in understanding the scope and dynamic of the political crisis that the Italian political system had to face in the early 1990s, attention has to be given to how the system was able to protect its stability over the last decades. Two major points can be mentioned here. The first concerns the relationship between DC-dominated governments and the Communist opposition and how the latter was effectively integrated into the system. The second highlights those mechanisms by which these two dominant parties succeeded in establishing viable subcultural milieus in which, both normatively and institutionally, consensus and political loyalty was generated:

1. In terms of a continuity of Christian Democrat governments after the War the stability in the power structures of Italian politics is mainly due to the design and modes of reproduction of the bipolar relationship between the DC and the Communist opposition. Vis-à-vis its traditional opponent, the governing block conducted a successful strategy based on a dual process of exclusion and inclusion. On the one hand, the legitimacy of the Christian Democrat's hegemony in Italian politics is ideologically rooted in anti-communism. The PCI was stigmatized as a threat to liberty and freedom *per se* (even in 1994 general elections, Berlusconi ideologically based his political force on an antiquated anti-communism). This ideological division and polarization created a persistent image of the far left as a political force beyond the boundaries of liberal democracy. The alternative between DC and PCI was framed as a decision for or against a certain political system instead of as a simple vote determining the governing force of the executive. In the discourse of the governing elite the left was portrayed not as a potential alternative for government but as a 'revolutionary' threat to the entire political order. The Communist left, for its part, framed its political aspirations more in terms of a 'system change' than as a simple change in government. Evaluating the bipolarity between DC and PCI, Scoppola (1991) speaks of two 'political religions' or 'churches' of the country opposing each other uncompromisingly. The result has been a *bipartitismo imperfetto* (imperfect two-party system)<sup>3</sup> in which alternation only occurs as a change within the governing regime and not as its replacement by the parliamentary opposition (Salvadori 1994).

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<sup>3</sup> The thesis of the imperfect two-party system was formulated by G. Galli in the 1960s (Galli 1966). His main thesis was that the bi-polarity of the dominating subcultures in Italy has led to a - by European standards - highly insufficient political culture of the ruling elite. The attitude of the leading class subsequently undermined the efficient functioning of Italian democracy. See for a critical discussion and actualization of this notion: Pridham (1987).

In addition to the systematic exclusion of the PCI from federal government on the basis of conflicting ideologies, there is an opposing tendency to integrate the opposition, which largely underpinned the stability of the post-war order. The governing block of the DC and its coalition partners successfully integrated the opposition without jeopardizing the existing arrangements of power. Accepting the common 'rules of the game' the PCI became a steady force in the institutional life of the political system. Albeit restricted, their political weight as the established opposition influenced policy-making without, however, seriously jeopardizing the DC hegemony. The resulting system of an inherently precarious continuity without any genuine change of the ruling elite or of the dominant political institutions, has been described in Italian as *trasformismo*. According to this term Italian politics has been characterized by a mechanism of integrating the opposition or at least parts of its elites in such a way that the existing distribution of power has never seriously been jeopardized. Priester describes this strategy of compromising with the opponent and simultaneously preserving the power base as follows:

'*Trasformismo*' is based on the assumption that the advancement of an organized opposition can be frustrated by including oppositional forces into the '*classe governanti*' (governing classes). The transformation of this ruling elite, which in Italy has been defined in a narrower sense as the 'political elite', protects the existing political system by building sporadic parliamentary majorities which are only based on pragmatic rather than on programmatic concerns. (Priester 1972:27)

The result was the stationary bipolarity between the PCI and the DC in which the political elite was able to protect its power from any significant competing aspirations, aiming at more far-reaching change. Beyond periodical quarrels within the governing coalitions, the continuity in the basic structures of power was secured. Governmental crises were solved by changing the leading figures and by reshuffling the influence of the different parties and fractions of the governing bloc<sup>4</sup>. The corresponding distribution of economic influence in (mostly state-run) business, i.e., material gratification for single politicians and parties, helped to secure the loyalty of those supporting a DC or PSI led administration.

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<sup>4</sup> In this respect one can formulate the seemingly paradoxical thesis that the equilibrium of the Italian system can be traced back to the endemic instability of Italian politics. On the one hand, this instability has meant a process of steady change and reorganization in the executive. The government formed under Berlusconi is indeed the 53rd since the foundation of the First Republic. Commentators have come to speak of a continuous crisis which characterizes the political system ('*La crisi Italiana*'; Graziano & Tarrow 1979). By this is meant a multiparty system in which the formation of a governing coalition is difficult and in which power is exercised by continuously bargaining fractions of parties. The resulting intrinsic dissent and conflict has shaped Italian politics for the last decades.

Furthermore, as latest revelations about clientelistic practices in the First Republic reveal, the former Communist Party is not totally free from an involvement into a system in which excess to state authority was used as a means for the promotion of single politicians' and the parties' own interests. On a local and regional level party representatives of the former PCI took (material) advantage of the bribes-based system even if not to such a systematic extent as the governing parties. In short, the established leftist opposition seemed to have accepted its detachment from national political power benefiting access to institutional power and resources from patronage practices instead of presenting itself as a credible alternative to DC hegemony. Pizzorno phrases this phenomenon of a covered and implicit concordance between the parties as a *cultura concordataria* ('commonly acknowledged culture'; Pizzorno 1993:88)<sup>5</sup>. Borrowing a term from Lijphart, Calise speaks in this context of an example of a 'consociational democracy' with no real opposition:

The main fault of Italian *consociativismo* was the covert bargaining among governmental parties in the process of coalition-building, but there was also the frequent collusion with the communist opposition in legislative decision-making. Both deprived the electorate of tracing a clear relationship between voting at elections and the outcome in terms of government." (Calise 1993:557)

This constellation frustrated politically relevant parliamentary opposition. At least until very recently, the bipolar system of Italian politics could perpetuate its exclusive logic and to relegate political conflict beyond their agenda to autonomous, albeit politically mostly ineffective forms of 'unconventional' collective actions. Traditionally, we were hence faced with a situation where the two main parties in Italian politics had sufficient ideological and institutional resources at their disposal to prevent any other political force to gain substantive influence in the political-parliamentary realm<sup>6</sup>. Both parties were able to frustrate protest behavior by the mix of ideological polarization and political cooperation on which their power

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<sup>5</sup> Pizzorno's interpretation of the phenomenon of *partitocrazia* runs along these lines. According to him the DC and PCI alike have equally succeeded in patronizing political demands from civil society. Competing unyieldingly on an ideological level the main protagonists of Italian politics, in their concrete practice both parties have contributed to a situation in which the consolidation and expansion of the own power base have become the main imperative of their action. For him ideological controversies have been of secondary importance in a shared system of mutual dependance and patronage (Pizzorno 1993) He defines the notion *partitocrazia* as a characterization of the political system as such: "Introduced at the beginning of the century and then re-employed after the Second World War, it refers to a situation in which the parties are compact units which centers - its offices - hold real power, i.e., the one to control the government, the administration, and the Parliament." (Pizzorno 1993:95)

<sup>6</sup> Fritsche speaks in this context about the threefold C-factor as the pillars of stability in Italian politics: Catholicism, Communism and Clientelism (Fritsche 1987).

was based. The parties in Italian politics were successful (at least in the long run) in incorporating any important social conflict into their political agenda and institutional framework<sup>7</sup>.

2. The second point which gave continuity to Italian politics was the successful attempt of the established parties to "colonize" (Habermas) social spaces beyond state agencies and institutions. Via the incorporation of the local social and economic elite the parties built up territorial strongholds where they were able to generate and protect an uncontested power base. Governmental and oppositional forces, however, generated political loyalty amongst their constituency on different grounds. In this respect, the hegemonic position of the DC in post-war politics is, next to the ideological polarization, based on the systematic use of state resources to generate consensus<sup>8</sup>. The governing bloc around the DC and PSI built their power on a system of assistential networks. When the help of an entire framework of public companies and para-state associations a patronage-based system of distribution was formed. Controlling key ministries for decades, the DC was able to build up a system of mutual interest with socio-economic actors. Institutions such as *Coldiretti* (farmers organization), *Confindustria* (Employer's organization) and *CISL* (Confederation of trade unions) were

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<sup>7</sup> It is against this background that in the past scholars argued that elections tend to be meaningless for Italian politics (La Palombara 1987).

<sup>8</sup> A brief history of the development of the 'party system' will help the reader unfamiliar with the Italian situation. The post-war Italian state was shaped by the constitution promulgated in the aftermath of the defeat of fascism. To allay fears of a resurgence of political authoritarianism, the Constituent Assembly of 1946 fashioned a very fragmented political power structure, which was superimposed on the fascist centralized state. The absence of a majority premium promoted the emergence of a very divided political representation, with numerous parties. In addition the Italian constitution mandated real bicameralism and a presidency with rather limited powers. Electoral fragmentation created a political stalemate, making it impossible to run parliament by strict majority rule. Not powerful enough to implement policies through democratic channels, the winning Christian Democratic party engaged in a systematic 'colonization' of state institutions. Influential people were placed at the leadership of most powerful institutions like the **Central Bank**, the **Cassa per il Mezzogiorno**, and local administrations. The state was then used as a powerful machine to produce political consent based on pervasive clientelism. Fragmentation promoted the emergence of a policy of patronage and, while blocking the possibility of implementing broad institutional reforms, promoted a system of political exchange based on the production of a multitude of small clientelistic laws. Party penetration in institutions was accompanied and supported by the political domination and expansion of the para-state. The state-owned sector of the economy reached massive proportions in the fifties, offering an additional powerful tool to exercise influence and to finance the Christian Democrats and other parties.

formed in close collaboration with the Christian Democrats<sup>9</sup>. Through these organizations as well as through influential public and private holdings a network of privileged linkages was established, which guaranteed specific social groups state controlled resources and, in turn, the governing parties a continual electoral support. This describes the background of the features of Italian politics by which legal political institutions are replaced in their influence on the policy-process by a highly structured system of power. The bureaucracy as well as the juridical and the state-run economic system have been accused of being subject to the parties' orders<sup>10</sup>. Commentators speak here about a party-based 'nomenclature'<sup>11</sup> dominating Italian politics, reflecting the failed modernization of the country in this respect. The DC in particular has engaged in a practice in colonizing of state (or state linked) institutions as of civil society (Scoppola 1991)<sup>12</sup>. The result was a patronage-based system which could last as long as its reproductive logic could be protected from public awareness and hence contesting political claims (a situation which came to an end with the juridical investigations of the campaign 'Clean Hands').

To understand the parties' dominance over a wide range of domains in Italian society one has to be aware of the fact that, in comparison to other Western states, the Italian economy is characterized by a high degree of state-run companies. The strong state-owned sector of the economy has been crucial in offering the ruling parties a decisive tool to exercise influence and to finance their party apparatus (and in some cases to fill the pockets of single

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<sup>9</sup> In this context should be mentioned a differentiated scheme of state assistance that was successful in generating, if not ideological bonds, a loyalty to state agencies based on the sheer necessity of one's material reproduction.

<sup>10</sup> A drastic picture of the political culture was drawn by the bishops in 1991: "As a feudal country characterized by privileges and bribes within public institutions Italy has to undergo a total crisis of legality. Its parties are degenerated to employment agencies and laws are normally the result of deals negotiated between social groups with blackmailing power and eager to secure privileges to maximize their own advantage." This group of politicians "that impose taxes, actively cooperate with the underworld and make the government a slave of private interests are no less worrying than the mafia." ('Italia senza legge: I vescovi condannano i politici', in: La Repubblica, November 11, 1991; cited in Sacco 1992)

<sup>11</sup> Turani, Giuseppe, 'L'ultima nomenklatura è quella di Roma' in: Il Corriere della Sera, September 11, 1991; see also Sacco (1992). For Galli della Loggia the "governing class in Italy has more in common with the Soviet nomenclature than with the leading political class in Western democracies." (Galli della Loggia 1994:230)

<sup>12</sup> The Italian case can be seen as the most outstanding example of a '*Parteienstaat*'. This term denotes a form of government which is characterized by the distinct dominance of parties over political institutions and the agents of civil society. In this triangle constitutive for political life parties have been successful in undermining the autonomy and influence of the other agents that might counterbalance their power (See for the related discussion: von Beyme (1993).

politicians). This important complex of national industry has hence been in the center of public's critique and juridical investigation regarding *tangentopoli* ("Bribesville"), the series of corruption scandals that has shaken Italian politics to its roots<sup>13</sup>.

In addition to this clientelistic routine and the assistential networks for different social groups (predominantly in the south of the country), the stability of the Italian political system and the preponderance of the DC and the old PCI - as the main party of opposition - have relied on each party's ability to generate their respective cultural milieus in civil society in which political loyalty was firmly reproduced. In generating this consensus - obviously compatible with the widespread cynicism regarding 'official politics' - the parties originated bulwarks of political dominance largely independent from changing political debates and the actual politics performed. This loyalty was created in a twofold manner. Firstly, confessional and class cleavages were made the basis of a clear-cut ideological division. The former PCI in particular was effective in creating institutions on a local level to confirm its political identity and generate strong ties of personal commitment in this daily life context. Through a network of political and cultural associations as well as recreational activities, sports, youth clubs and bars, the former Communist party was thus able to create these strong ties with certain segments of society<sup>14</sup>. These socio-cultural milieus have been a critical element of the political culture of the country. Regarding both the communist subculture and the network of catholic associations, Lanaro speaks about a "second society in which the movement has become the embryo of a second political system." (Lanaro 1988:96). They, on the basis of a well defined ideological option, secured a high continuity in voting behavior, the "*voto di appartenenza*" (vote of belonging).

In light of the deterioration of these stable features of Italian politics in the early 1990s, the question arises as to how this firmly rooted political order came to the abrupt end. How was it possible that a political force such as the Lega could make territorial identity the

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<sup>13</sup> Obviously 'normal practice' has made it obligatory for companies to pay *tangenti* when being awarded a business order. Therefore, one of the first major decisions of Prime Minister Ciampi was to advance the privatization of important state holdings, amongst which IRI (Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale) and ENI (Ente nazionale idrocarburi). The *Economista* comments on the clientelistic practices in this field: "Italy resembled communist Eastern democracies regarding the importance of party connections. Patronage was king. Bigger jobs, bigger pensions, industrial companies, television stations - all were parcelled out by *lottizzazione*, the practice of rewarding parties according to their support at the most recent elections. Since all parties were involved to some degree, none had an interest in changing the system."

<sup>14</sup> See: Leonardi & Wertmann (1989); see also: Barnes (1977).

reference point of massive mobilization processes, challenging the traditional ideological reference points of Italian politics? The answer to this question as to how this radical challenge to the established parties became feasible will be given in two parts. The first shows the historic dimension of the center-periphery conflict in Italy, in reaction to which the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* and the Lega formulated their political claims. Regionalist aspirations are described here as a latent source of political conflict that has gained political significance with the profound crisis in Italian politics. The thesis which will be developed in the second part is that it was only with the old parties' gradual loss of legitimation and the dissolution of the bipolarity between the Catholic and Marxist political forces, that the center-periphery conflict could gain influence as a mobilizing political issue. The logic on which the stability in Italian politics was built eroded in the late 1980s and the early 1990s to such an extent that it allowed for a thorough transformation of its main features, providing new opportunities for political actors beyond the bipolar logic that had shaped Italian politics for decades.

## 6.2. The Heritage of a Young Nation-state

Considering the relatively low degree of internal unity of the Italian nation-state, the persistence of notable dialectal and cultural as well as socio-economic differences<sup>15</sup> between its parts, the 'objective' preconditions for regionalist mobilization have been salient. Regardless of these given lines of potential conflict between distinct parts of the Italian nation-state, however, regionalism has not become - with the exception of the French Val d'Aosta, the German community in South Tyrol and the peculiar case of Sardegna - a main feature of Italian politics (Sabetti 1982). This is all the more remarkable because of the unredeemed federalist promise that has accompanied Italy since its inauguration. Historically, the competing particularistic political loyalties and cultures forced into the Piemontesian unifying aspiration were the deeper reason for the French centralistic design that was chosen for the Italian nation-state (Beales 1981)<sup>16</sup>. The nation was too diverse in its composition to allow for a decentralized institutional arrangement of its internal organization. Italian society

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<sup>15</sup> For instance in economic terms the income in Northern Italian cities is on average more or less twice as high as in the south; see for further details: 'Ecco l'Italia dei due portafogli' in: *LaRepubblica* 28.3.92.

<sup>16</sup> See for a short description of the emergence of the highly centralized unitary Italian nation-state: Zariski (1983).

has preserved strong cultural and social dividing lines. In Italy the formation of state and nation never came, due to changing historic reasons, into firm alignment indicating the lack of a strong and uniting national identity. Italy of the *risorgimento* induced D'Azeglio to make his famous statement: "We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians."

Similarly in modern Italy a unifying sense of belonging to the nation was too weak to generate stable loyalties to a political entity that substantially lacked legitimating resources in the daily life experiences of its citizens. Allegiances to the nation-state were mainly generated by mediating institutions present in civil society of which the parties are the most prominent ones. Against this background it is comprehensible that a legitimacy crisis of these main representatives of the state is likely to put under pressure a nation-state deprived of a strong over-arching collective identity. The most vulnerable point of the Italian nation-state is in this respect the still prominent split between the south and the north. The immense cultural, economic and social difference is a burden of Italian society and feasible starting point for political projects based on territorially framed forms of collective identity. The persistence of such subnational differences and identities, as the example of the Lega shows, is prone to become the source of processes of inclusion and exclusion thus jeopardizing national unity<sup>17</sup> (Bocca 1991).

It would be highly speculative and misleading to trace back the new significance of territorial politics in Italy to the forced and in many ways deficient nation-building in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, comparing the Italian case to other European nation-states the cultural diversity and economic disunity of the Italian nation-state is striking. These features have created a latent source of potential conflict inducing, next to the cynicism vis-à-vis Roman governmental agencies, a structural openness for particularistic claims in the name of smaller communities<sup>18</sup>. Politically more decisive, however, is the fact that the Italian nation-state has never developed an institutional framework to integrate the different regions

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<sup>17</sup> Cartocci describes this 'Achilles verse' of the Italian nation-state as follows: "Convincingly Rokkan has attributed the delay and difficulties of the birth of a single nation-state in Italy to the presence of a poli-centric and balanced structure of regional states that have come into being after the failure the common civility. Yet, once unification is achieved, the most severe obstacles to the building of the nation are generated by the co-existence of a middle-north part with an urbanized face and the southern area that has not known the common civility." (Cartocci 1990:199). See in this respect Putnam's study (1993) about the radically different civic traditions in both parts of Italy.

<sup>18</sup> In this respect the phenomenon of *campanilismo*, the emotional and political attachment to one's own city or village, is to be mentioned; see: G. Lerner 'Quei mille campanili senza Stato. Nella selva dei particolarismi, dove si fa la disunità d'Italia', in: LaRepubblica, 22./23.3.1992.

equally into the national political system. Since the complain about this unfulfilled federalist promise of a *de-facto* highly centralized state (compared to Germany and the United States) is the *raison d'être* of the political movements under investigation, this point will be briefly focused on.

### 6.3. Unfulfilled Regionalisation in Italy

In considering the social and political changes which have brought about conditions conducive to the emergence of strong regionalist political forces in Italy, one has to be aware - in addition to the strong localist tradition - of the development of center-periphery relations in the Italian nation-state. In this context the relation between the nation-state and the regions can not only be described in terms of a functional division of labor between two administrative units. What is inherently is the question of the legitimate exercise of political power on different levels of decision-making in the policy process. Correspondingly, the discourse on the issue of decentralization is intimately linked to concerns about normative concerns, most prominently about democratic legitimacy.

In political debate the relationship between the centralized power of the nation-state and the regions has been framed in conflictual terms whenever major political reforms seemed to be unavoidable and the hierarchical organization of the state has been seen as, at least partly, responsible for the misuse of power. Some historical considerations<sup>19</sup> are helpful in this respect: in the light of Mussolini's fascist totalitarian regime, there was a broad political agreement in post war Italy that the new constitution should give a high degree of power and resources to the regions as a safeguard against the centralization of power and the anti-democratic threat endemic to it.

However, although written into the Constitution (Art.114-133)<sup>20</sup>, and designed as a thorough institutional reform of the Italian nation-state, the political rights of the regions

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<sup>19</sup> It should be mentioned in this context that since the *Risorgimento* a thorough federalization of the country has been a realistic option in Italian politics. It is not by accident that for example in the publications of Italian regionalist movements the reference is often made to Carlo Cattaneo, whose ideas of a strict federal order for the young nation-state were defeated.

<sup>20</sup> Because of their ethnic minorities four regions obtained a special status, namely Sicilia, Sardegna, Val d'Aosta, and Trento-Alto Adige. See for a discussion on the constitutional aspects: Sabetti 1982.

turned out to be little more than a plaything of the major national parties and their respective interests. The implementation of constitutional rights was systematically delayed until the 1960s. Although the Constitutive Assembly instituted a territorial structure composed of 19 (later 20) regions, these entities were deprived of almost any political right. Italy has never become a federal state. Formally, the *regioni a statuto normale* (Regions with normal status) were only adjudged their constitutional rights with a financial law in 1970 and the *consiglio regionale* (Regional Parliament) gained some highly limited administrative competence<sup>21</sup>. It was at this point in Italian history that the executive of the regions, the *giunta regionale* (regional regime) could exercise some of its legally assigned functions for the first time.

After World War II, the DC used its absolute majority in Parliament and their control of state bureaucracy to hinder important steps toward regionalisation in order to defend their power base in Rome. If politically meaningful at all, the reference to the region has been important in defining certain strongholds of influential personalities and their respective *correnti* (competing fractions) within the DC itself<sup>22</sup>. It is one of the characteristics of a political system dominated by the impregnable hegemony of one party that political plurality and opposition is exercised to a large extent within the party itself. Regarding the Christian Democratic party, LaPalombara speaks of a "confederation consisting of local and regional notables who are in effect political warlords." (LaPalombara 1987: 223) Regardless of the fact that DC politicians had their favored regions - Andreotti made Rome his domain, Tuscany became Fanfani's and Naples Gava's stronghold and Trentino was the region where Piccoli used to have his supporters - the region as a political unit with substantial rights for self-determination has not ranked high on the agenda of Italian politics (Dente 1985). As Cassese summarizes: "Despite a good deal of talk on the subject, the region in Italy from 1860 onwards was an institution that was substantially alien to tradition and little accepted." (Cassese 1984:19)

The Communist Party's (PCI) standpoint had a basically similar attitude towards this issue. Although its strongholds were in certain Italian regions, the PCI was ideologically committed to a 'national perspective'. Its regional policy was strategically designed to fortify

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<sup>21</sup> Putnam and his associates have shown how the strong political pressure for decentralization, backed by a strong indigenous economic development in the regions, culminated in the devolution act of 1977 (see: Putnam et al. 1985)

<sup>22</sup> See on this point: Hausmann (1989) and Spotts/ Wiesner (1985).

a socialist alternative for the nation-state. Decentralization itself was never a dominant political goal of the Italian Communist Party. To form regional or municipal governments was for the PCI not so much a goal in itself but mainly a means by which it hoped, in long terms, to conquer Rome. Besides the respective strategic interests of both dominant parties in Italian politics, the DC used its power base in the regions to generate a clientelistic network responsible for the corrupt practices on a regional and communal level. The juridical investigations of the pool *mani pulite* ("clean hands") have shed light on this system based on mutual benefits and bribes.

Far more important than political loyalties to regions has been the fact that Italian society has been clustered into different subcultures, a system of shared normative and behavioral codes, amongst which the Communist and the Catholic have been the decisive ones. It is one of the well known features of Italian political culture that the nation's political landscape has been and, to a lesser extent, still is radically divided into Christian Democrat dominated *zone bianche* and Communist *zone rosse*. In this respect regions are territories with in some cases viable political subcultures (Gallino 1983) and, in the 'red zones', a net of cooperations and civic organizations have flourished, but they have not been perceived as territorial units to which to assign political loyalties and obligations.

The issue of regionalism itself, however, only returned to the political agenda with the social unrest of the late 1960s and the advent of the first *centro-sinistra* government with the participation of the Socialist Party, the PSI (Putnam et al. 1985). In 1970 some political and financial rights were given to the regions, among which the regional finance law was of crucial importance. However, as Mény points out, the devolution policy (i.e., the transfer of meaningful political rights and resources to the regions) has primarily remained the "indirect consequence of national party strategy" (Mény 1986:8). Juridical restrictions and fiscal bonds have substantially limited the regions' capacity to make autonomous decisions concerning their development. Almost 90% of the income of the regions was composed of transfer payments from the national government of which about 85% were earmarked for a specific destination<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, Italy does not have a chamber for representatives of the regions comparable to the German *Bundesrat* and hence elections on a regional level do not have

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<sup>23</sup> This point of a systematically obstructed regionalisation in Italy is well described in: Merkel (1986) and Cassese (1984).

great weight in Italian politics (although there are plans, mainly at the instigation of the Lega, to change the Italian Senate accordingly).

Up to the present day the autonomy of policy-making of the regions has thus remained more than restricted. As Mény argues, the concession of the political establishment at the beginning of the 1970s, which claimed to be the starting point for a gradual regionalisation, primarily helped to overcome the severe problems of modernizing the country. Recently Pastoris commented on this phase with the phrase 'Regions without regionalism' (Pastoris 1980). Instead of granting substantial rights to the regions this 'state regionalism from above' has led to a further strengthening of the state's regulatory power, and thus to intensified centralization,- despite official declarations to the contrary<sup>24</sup>. As Berti concludes in his analysis:

Regional reorganization was carried out in the tradition of the Italian parties' political conduct of using institutional tools and therefore .... not to meet society's need and aspirations, but to maintain at all events an operational consensus for protecting the power base and preserving the role of the party system. (Berti 1979: 482)<sup>25</sup>

The reality of this unfulfilled regionalisation can be seen as a long-standing, albeit rather dormant source of political conflict in Italy, and therefore as such is only able to partly explain the emergence of the regionalist leagues at the present time. The question is as to why, after decades of being in the shadow other political issues, the agenda of the center-periphery conflict became a shaping feature in Italian politics. It has to explained how it became possible that recently in Italian politics a profound decentralization in the form of a federalization of the country has come to be seen as a feasible means of democratic reform. The hypothesis is that the Lega has successfully reformulated this conflict, profiting from broader social and political developments which have given the bargaining between the Roman center and the northern regions a new political weight. It is not by accident that amongst the institutional reforms that have been implemented was the delegation to the regions of legislative power in three key ministries (those of tourism, state participation and agriculture) and the decision that citizens are now able to elect their majors directly. With the revelations on the clientelistic practices on local as the national level (an aspect which will be examined) the Lega found new opportunities to launch a far-reaching reorganization of decision-making processes in favor of decentralized, participatory elements.

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<sup>24</sup> See in this context: Tarrow (1979).

<sup>25</sup> See also: Dente (1985).

In order to frame this issue in more theoretical terms it is instructive to use Dente's concept of 'functional legitimacy' formulated in line with Weber's notion of the citizen's willingness to voluntarily obey the rules of the game. This form of legitimacy is in modern society dependent, as Dente states, on the fact that "mass loyalty of the population towards the political/administrative system is a consequence of its ability to satisfy the demands and the needs of the population." (Dente 1988:182) The political situation in Italy has reached a point in which the dissatisfaction with the efficiency of public services as with the state of democratic representation has led to a severe legitimation crisis. One important way of meeting the citizens' demand is to redefine the relationship between center and periphery and to strengthen intermediating political units such as the regions. Thus the notion of decentralization, far from being the exclusive domain of regionalist organizations, has entered mainstream political discourse in Italy.

The thesis can hence be advanced that a territorial identity and the related political agenda could gain political significance only in a period of crisis of ideologies and a coinciding escalating crisis in the political system. A protest in the name of regional self-determination has become attractive at a time when traditional political forces and their respective agenda have lost credibility and their ability to create strong bonds of loyalties between the electorate and the national mass parties. The background for the growing relevance of the center-periphery conflict can thus be related to the condition that the Communist and Catholic dominance as the main pillar of the stability of Italian politics must have been substantially weakened to allow this agenda to find new political prominence. In a broader perspective the loss of authority of the traditional political system and - more precisely - of those political forces which have represented that system for the last decades has provided the ground for the emergence of political claims based on territorial collective identities. The declining relevance of so far dominating cleavages and lines of political conflict has given significance to a new and traditionally widely neglected political agenda. In the following some of the most significant features of the crisis shaping the Italian political system will be pointed out.

#### 6.4. The 'Legitimation Crisis' in Italian Politics

"Italians are now living day by day their 14 of July 1789. An old Regime has been delegitimized and one by one its men are falling." (U. Eco, L'Espresso, Feb., 23. 1993)

The figures concerning the shift of electoral support from the April 1992 general elections onwards - culminating in the defeat of the DC and the PSI in the 1994 elections - clearly showed that, having dominated Italian politics for almost half a century, the governing coalition led by the DC was about to lose its majority. Further regional and local elections that took place in this period confronted Italians with a unique situation: given the actual distribution of voters' preferences, for the first time in post-war history the DC was no longer able to control the governing coalition in such a way that any opposition could be systematically excluded from access to substantial power. Particularly in the north, due to the Lega's success, its hegemonic position of the traditional political elite was largely eroded. The logic of the 'democracy without alternation' no longer holds. In pointing to the dynamic and reasons for the deteriorating crisis of the traditional actors in Italian politics, it will become clear that the entire logic on which the 'democracy without alteration' was traditionally built has changed. The astonishing decline of the established parties, mainly the governing block but the established left as well, is due to the productive co-existence of short- and long-term developments in Italian politics that have contributed to the 'revolutionary' change in its landscape (Guzzini 1994).

##### 6.4.1. Features of Disintegration

The delegitimation of the political establishment has been decisively spurred by the unmasking of a series of corruption scandals (*tangentopoli*) - initially in Milan, Rome, and Venice - the arrest of high-ranking politicians, particularly from the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Socialists (PSI). All began when in February 1992 the Socialist Mario Chiesa was caught taking bribes. His confessions and the juridical examinations initiated on the grounds of this have exposed an entire system of corruption not only involving single politicians but all major parties, public agencies and important private companies. The extent of the corruption - in some cases the complete political leadership of a province is accused of being involved in this scandal - indicates that this phenomenon is not a matter of the failure of single politicians. An entire system has been installed, in which politicians and industrialists

promoted a symbiosis based on extensive illegal transactions. In the period between February 1992 and October 1994 799 persons came under juridical investigation out of which 179 were already condemned<sup>26</sup>. The total amount of bribes paid is beyond exact calculation. Given however that a fixed proportion of any contract had to be paid to the politician or the party in control of the decision, the Economist estimated the total sum of bribes to be around four billion \$US a year (March 10, 1993). The end of these investigations - *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) - under the Milanese judges headed by Antonio Di Pietro is not yet in sight. These revelations have confronted the Italian public with the devastating consequences of a political system which has been dominated by the same political forces since its implementation after World War Two and controlled for almost two decades by a coalition led by the DC and the PSI.

This phenomenon that a small circle of Milanese judges were able to initiate and drive a process during the course of which the established political parties were largely delegitimized, needs further attention. It is not the reality of clientilistic and corrupt practices which must be explained, - they were not new or unknown features in Italian politics. Instead, one must question why the juridical investigations against high ranking politicians were conducted at this particular time (the early 1990s) and why the *pool mani pulite* could initiate such an astonishing dynamic in terms of the political consequences its activities had. The argument advanced here is that the political environment had changed in such a way so as to allow the Milanese judiciary to successfully challenge first local and then national political authority. The judges found a public space at least partly freed from direct domination by the governing elite. The thesis can be formulated that it was only with the rise of new political actors - most prominently the Lega - and the corresponding decline of the hegemonic power of the governing bloc dominated by the DC and the PSI, that the juridical investigation could gain this prominence in shaping Italian politics in the early 1990s. The disintegration of the traditional political elite in Italian politics by the public disclosure of the illegal logic at work in large parts of policy making, became only feasible with the rise of political forces beyond the logic of the established party system. The advent of new political forces in the electoral

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<sup>26</sup> Figures published in La Repubblica, October 15, 1994. According to Libération, by mid February 1993, 460 people were under investigation; three party secretaries, the Socialist leader B. Craxi, the Social Democrat Vizzini, and the Republican La Malfa, nine ministers of former cabinets, 46 MPs and twelve Senators, 192 local administrators, and 198 business men.

arena was spurred by the revelations about the *tangentopoli*, but concurrently their growing political influence meant guaranteeing the working conditions for the Milanese judges.

However, the political dynamic which was initiated by the *pool mani pulite* and which resulted in the collapse of the First Republic would have not been feasible, if the power of the traditional parties had been firmly anchored in the above-mentioned features. The structural base of their hegemony had been in a state of deterioration before. This is indicated by the profoundness and dynamic of the political crisis which Italy has witnessed since the early 1990s. Describing these changes it is necessary to see that the features of the prevailing crisis in the political sphere have to be integrated into a wider perspective of crucial developments in Italian society. One main development can be identified which has largely contributed to the disintegration of traditional patterns of Italian politics: the end of the East-West conflict and its impact of on the socio-cultural milieu by which the DC and the PCI used to reproduce political loyalties.

When the East-West conflict ended, the legitimation of the two major political actors deteriorated. Confessional and class cleavages have lost their defining impact on Italian politics<sup>27</sup>. The fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent new ideological orientations provided the ground for the emergence of novel lines of political conflicts<sup>28</sup>. The diminishing ideological polarization has allowed for an electoral volatility unknown in the First Republic (Allum 1992). The traditional electoral discipline broke up and in particular the traditional partisan of the DC felt freed from the overriding imperative of 'communist containment'. Anti-communism is no longer a credible determinant for their political preferences. The actual performance of single parties and politicians increasingly became a more important criterium for political support. Likewise, for the first time since the inauguration of the First Republic economic elites saw the opportunity of taking a more critical stand vis-à-vis the political establishment (and its patronage-based system) without running the risk of a 'Communist take-over'. As Codevilla observes commenting on the electoral results in 1992:

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<sup>27</sup> Pointing to the changing role of mass media based communication Sani and Segatti point to the gradual disintegration of these subcultures: "The solidity and steadiness of a subculture is nourished by a flow of information characterized by a high degree of 'cognitive congruence'. If the different channels of communication transmit diverse and conflicting messages, the attachment and shared beliefs that form the normative nucleus of a subculture are necessarily weakened..." (Sani & Segatti 1991:150)

<sup>28</sup> Cartocci brings the rise of the Lega in a direct relation to the decline of the so far dominating ideological and subcultural division of Italian society. The "political secularization, i.e., the reduced influence of the subcultural ideologies, may pave the way for the onset of localism and regionalism." (Cartocci 1991:731)

In the wake of the 1992 elections little is clear other than that the first Italian republic is all but dead. Contrary to the views of eminent academics, anticommunism was the only reason why the Italian people tolerated it. As soon as they were able to junk the system safely, they set about the task with *gusto*. (Codevilla 1992:164)

The declining prominence of ideological confrontation along traditional lines (class-based rhetoric and anti-communism as the most important elements) is of critical significance in this respect. New issues have replaced the old ideational basis for political loyalty. The common features of traditional parties regarding their practices in the First Republic has become a popular image. The contrast between the 'old' and 'new' parties has successfully replaced the established antagonism between Catholics and Communists in the political discourse of large parts of the Italian public. The revelations of *tangentopoli* in fact contributed to the image that this system of illegally financing the party and extending the parties' influence to all crucial spheres of public life by a policy of patronage and clientilism has worked, to a differing degree, for all parties beyond ideological commitments.

It is against this background that the revelations of the Milanese judges on the Italian public could have such serious effects on political life in Italy: the argument is that with the campaign *Mani Pulite* the relationship between the parties and the electorate have decisively changed. It is indubitably true that already surveys from the 1980s demonstrate that dissatisfaction with the political system is no new phenomenon. Distrust of the 'political class'<sup>29</sup> is a constitutive part of the political culture traditionally dominant in Italy. The split between the *paese legale* and the *paese reale*, indicating a thorough estrangement between the institutional arrangement of the state and its representatives in politics and bureaucracy and the citizens, is one of the most well-known features referred to by commentators of Italian politics<sup>30</sup>. Interpreting these features, however, one has to differentiate between

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<sup>29</sup> The term 'political class' as the object of downright hostile feelings from the citizen has in this respect a twofold meaning: it firstly serves as an abstract reference point in articulating protest against general political mismanagement. Secondly, this notion gains a concrete meaning in identifying those personalities that, on each level of societal life, have decisive influence on political, administrative and economic affairs. "The term political class is thus abstract and concrete at the same time, and one has considerable leeway in imagining who represents its incarnation." (LaPalombara 1987: 157)

<sup>30</sup> Surveys conducted by the Eurobarometer show that Italians are consistently less satisfied with their government in comparison to the citizens in other European countries. Asked about whether they are satisfied with the functioning of their democratic institutions only 25.4% Italians in comparison with 56.8% of the French and 75.7% of the German citizens approved this question. See in this context also LaPalombara's chapter on Italy ('Italy: Fragmentation, Isolation, Alienation') in the Civic Culture Study from the 1960s (Pye & Verba 1965:282-329). Against this background, Pasquino predicted already in the early 1980s, ended up "becoming a separated body from civil society" (Pasquino 1983: 192-93; Pasquino 1982) altogether. They created a normative and

unequivocal disinterest in politics as such and deep rooted mistrust vis-à-vis the individuals with political responsibility and the institutional structures they represent. The latter element of Italian political cultures is, as recent political developments show, a steady potential of unrest exploitable by political entrepreneurs who are able to convert apathy and cynicism into active protest behavior (Mannheimer 1991).

In this respect, the juridical campaign *mani pulite* and its effect of rendering public the corrupt practices of leading politicians led to a new quality in the legitimacy crisis of the ruling elite. This deep mistrust vis-à-vis the political establishment crisis does not primarily refer to inadequate procedures in legislative procedures, but rather addresses the conditions of the formation of representative assemblies and hence calls into question the parties and - more broadly - the electoral system<sup>31</sup>. Pasquino formulates this new dimension of 'anti-party' feelings as follows:

Some corruption had always been known to exist in Italian politics and to have affected the DC and the PSI. However, the revelation of its pervasiveness appeared as a shocking surprise and was a devastating blow not just for the parties involved, but for the party system as such. (Pasquino 1993b:7)

The growing impertinence of a political elite predominantly preoccupied with preserving its own basis of political power has alienated it from large parts of the Italian electorate. The prevalent image is that these parties are not able or even willing to adequately represent the interests of the voters; the party system gains a life of its own which is driven by *clientilismo* and given power structures in the party-dominated administration rather than by democratic decision making. The image of politicians - regardless of their party affiliation - became dominated by notions such as 'arrogance'<sup>32</sup> and 'greed'. Pizzorno speaks in this context of

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institutional environment conducive to their own material and political reproduction (public financing).

<sup>31</sup> Drawing on H. Pitkin's work Pasquino said that 'there is no specific institution nor organization nor mechanism that can guarantee, in and of itself, the existence of sufficient political representation. It is the arrangement in its entirety that can be defined as political representation; the links between the various organizations and institutions, rather than the functioning of single institutions and organizations, can be defined as political representation.' (Pasquino 1986:123). See also: Pitkin (1972).

<sup>32</sup> In a survey conducted by Donatella della Porta interviewees in fact often used the notion of "arrogance" when describing the perceived behavior of professional politicians. She noted a decisive radicalization in public attitude towards the political establishment ('Corruzione e carriere politiche: immagini dei politici d'affari', *Stato e Mercato*, No.34, April 1992, p.47ff.

a "vicious circle of arrogance", resulting in a disruption of the close link of civil society and politics<sup>33</sup>.

Juridical investigations have directly contributed to processes of political delegitimation. In addition to the information about the range of corruption to be found in Italian politics have the revelations of the 1980s about the secret 'circle' P2 have reinforced the public image of a highly organized power elite, remote from public control and equipped with a seemingly omnipotent influence on Italian politics and society. By the same token, inquiries into organized crime, instead of reassuring trust into state authority, have had a devastating effect on the image of the traditional political elite in Italy. The recent remarkably successful fight against organized crime in Italy in fact has shed new light on the connection between the Mafia and official politics. On the one hand, the enhanced effort of the state to combat the Mafia has led to a noticeable number of arrests in the last years; on the other hand, these successes in the fight against organized crime have brought to the fore the strong ties between 'respectable' politicians and the organized crime. Antonio Gava, the former minister of the Interior and high ranking DC politician, is only one of the most prominent cases in this respect. This has largely contributed to the popular image of an impenetrable political world guided by patronage and (unlawful) financially-based power (Catanzaro 1993).

The rise of a new political force such as the Lega on its part stimulated another dynamic which played a role in delegitimizing the established political elite. Its increasing political weight and the political agenda beyond the established ideological antagonism critically contributed to the formation of an effective opposition. The widespread, albeit diffuse critique of the state in general and the parties in particular was transformed into actual protest behavior. As a result we are confronted with a process of delegitimation of the political establishment which supersedes the anti-elitist character of political culture traditionally dominant in Italy. The end of the 1980s saw the beginning of a phase in Italian politics in which the traditional parties are gradually less able to absorb protest and articulate the widespread dissatisfaction with the way in which politics is conducted (Mannheimer 1992c).

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<sup>33</sup> Similarly Pizzorno relates the current crisis in Italian politics back to the structural weakness of civil society vis-à-vis a party system stabilized by all traditional parties regardless of their ideological orientation: "The origins of the corruption of the political life which exploded in the 1980s and the covered *consociativismo* which established its roots in the 1950s can be attributed to the failed development of civil society in Italy." (Pizzorno 1993: 86) Scholars in this field have traditionally pointed to the particular case of Italian political culture in this context. In its main features it is characterized by the antagonistic coexistence of a vibrant civil society and a static and unresponsive political system (See: Beneviati 1987; Altan 1989).

In effect, a potential of political discontent has grown which is easily exploitable by populist forces, ready to give meaning to a new political agenda beyond those formulated by Marxism and Catholicism<sup>34</sup>. Thus, the end of the Cold-War bipolarity, mirrored by the traditional Italian party scene, largely contributed to the termination of the logic underlying the 'democracy without alternation'. New political opportunities emerged for actors which political identity was defined in explicit opposition to the so far prevailing logic of Italian politics.

#### 6.4.2. The Electoral Decline of the Old Parties and Institutional Change

As a result of the dynamic set in motion by of the juridical investigation of its traditional representatives, in electoral terms the political system in Italy is in a state of radical reorganization so far unknown in Western democracies. The late 1980s and the early 1990s inaugurated the steady decline of the political establishment of the country. What had been stable for the decades after the war, became subject to a steady process of decay. The features of disintegration notable until 1992 turned into the 'free fall' of the old governing parties after the revelations of *tangentopoli*.

Reflecting the voting results for the period 1987-1992 the table IV (p.137) not only shows the substantial loss in electoral support of the traditional parties (1) and the governing block (2), but also demonstrates a new phenomenon in Italian politics: it is not the case now as it was in the past that traditional parties of the left (3) or the different new organizations with such a political orientation automatically benefit from the decline of the established political forces. Manifestly, the old logic of the bi-polar structure of political life in Italy no longer holds. Traditional parties as such, regardless of their political orientation, have faced a significant loss in electoral support. These votes are either not directed towards another political force at all (abstention: 6) or it is the Lega that has benefited from the drop of the traditional parties (5). Here, the defeat of traditional actors was most severe in the north of

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<sup>34</sup> Waters points to the key elements of this transformation: "The political elections of 1992 mark the conclusion of a long period in Italian political history. The fall of the Berlin wall, the dissolution of the Communist systems in Eastern Europe, the transformation of the PCI to the PDS, the consequent decline in importance of the *conventio ad excludendum* of the major opposition parties from government, the advent of the Lega and the *tangentopoli* affair are concomitant events which signal the end of the 'Italian case' in its traditional form." (Waters 1994:180-81)

Italy. The Lega, particularly in the North (Lombardy), was able to capitalize on the dissatisfaction with the old regime and to present itself as a credible alternative. Similarly the figure on the next page shows that the vote for 'new' parties, i.e. every party except the PCI, PSI, PSDI, PRI, DC, PLI and MSI, grew at an outstanding rate in the late 1980s and early 1990s (related to the electoral results in Northern Italy the figures would be even more impressive). Another figure is illuminating in this respect: the combined votes from the PC and the PCI (later PDS and *Rifondazione Comunista*) dropped from 67% in 1976 to slightly less than 45% in 1992<sup>35</sup>. This trend, however, has been accelerated since the public has become aware of the amplitude of *tangentopoli*.

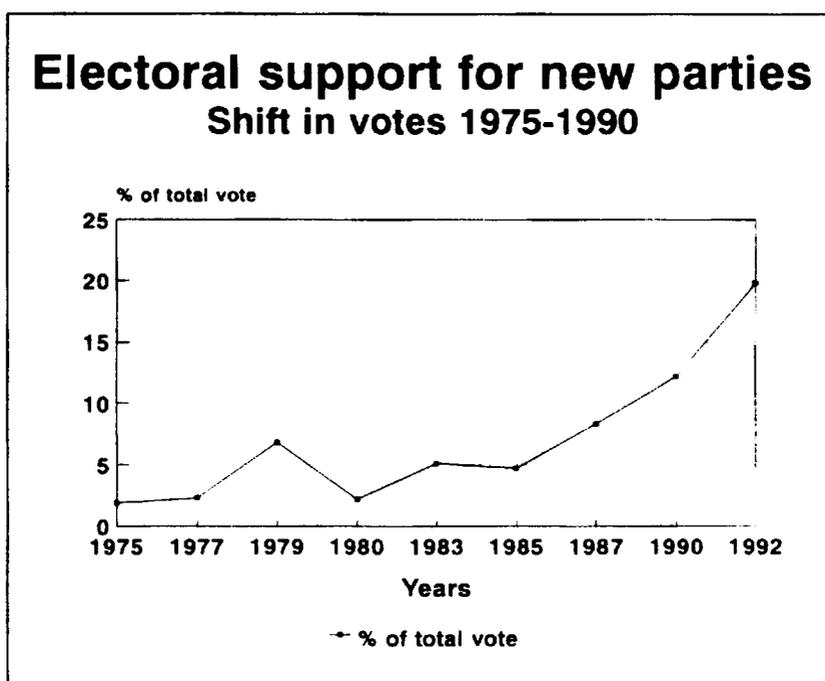


Figure 1

On the basis of the latter data one can point to an aspect which will be described as decisive for the rise of the Lega. The juridical revelations resulted in a thorough delegitimation of the traditional parties in Italian politics and gave rise to 'anti-party sentiments' as a crucial determinant of politics. This development furnished favorable

<sup>35</sup> See for a discussion of the declining consensus for the traditional parties Mannheim's 'La crisi del consenso per i partiti tradizionali' (in: Biorcio & Mannheim 1991:13-33)

conditions and opportunities for political forces which political identity is essentially defined by the opposition to these established agents of Italian politics. In particular populist forms of protest behavior found a fertile ground for their discourse on the estrangement between party-based official politics and the 'normal' citizens.

Correspondingly, the changes in electoral behavior between 1987 and 1992 indicate that the political scene was about to change radically. For the first time since the Second World War a change in government became feasible. In 1992 general elections the at the time governing *quadripartito* (four-party coalition - DC, PSI, PSDI, PLI<sup>36</sup> - headed by the DC), lost its majority in Parliament (48.7%). The new quality of this situation was that numerically the broadest coalition ever formed by the Christian Democrats and supported by the Socialists - the so-called *pentapartito* (Five-party coalition) - found itself at the verge of losing its capacity to form a viable government. The governing parties under the lead of the DC were thus about to lose the majority with which they had been able to dominate Italian politics over the last decades. This meant that an alternation in government, not only as a transformation of the old nomenclature but in the sense of a replacement of the government by the parliamentary opposition, was no longer a categorically excluded option. In this sense the results of the general elections in 1992 not only indicate a major shift in the political preferences of the electorate but mark a critical threshold in Italian politics (Bartolini & Mair 1990).

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<sup>36</sup> See for the abbreviations the next page.

**Figure IV: Shift in voting behavior in general elections in Italy and Lombardy from 1987 to 1992**

Years	Italy					Lombardy				
	'87	'89	'90	'92	diff.% '92/'87	'87	'89	'90	'92	diff.% '92/'87
Traditional Parties (1)	76. 0	66. 6	57. 5	66. 3	-12.8	77. 8	65. 1	60. 1	57. 6	-26.0
Governing Parties (2)	45. 4	39. 7	43. 4	40. 3	-11.2	48. 9	40. 8	39. 5	35. 8	-26.8
Traditional Left (3)	36. 0	33. 0	31. 1	29. 2	-18.9	38. 2	32. 6	29. 5	26. 3	-31.1
New and old Left (4)	40. 3	38. 6	36. 0	34. 1	-15.4	43. 7	38. 7	34. 8	32. 4	-25.9
Lega and other Leagues (5)	1.6	1.7	5.7	9.2	+479.0	3.7	7.8	19. 6	24. 7	+567.0
Abstention (6)	15. 4	24. 3	19. 9	17. 4	+12.1	10. 8	19. 5	10. 9	11. 5	+6.5

(1) DC - PDS (PCI) - PRC - PRI - PSI - MSI - PR - PLI - PSDI

(2) DC - PSI - PLI - PSDI

(3) PDS (PCI) - PRC - DP - PSI

(4) PDS (PCI) - PRC - DP - PSI - PR - Verdi (Greens) - Rete - Referendum

(5) Lega and Groups close to it (other Leagues, Pensionist)

(DC= Democrazia Cristiana; PDS= Partito Democratica della Sinistra; PRC = Partito Rifondazione Comunista; PRI= Partito Repubblicano Italiano; PSI= Partito Socialista Italiano; MSI= Movimento Sociale Italiano; PR= Partito Radicale; PLI= Partito Liberale Italiano; PSDI= Partito Socialdemocratico Italiano; DP= Democrazia Proletaria)

The crisis in Italian politics resulted in the call for far-reaching institutional reform. The growing alienation between citizens and Roman government in the early 1980s had already provoked the setting up of different parliamentary committees designed to examine proposals for constitutional reforms (Mangiatoridi & Ursino 1985). In this context the *Commissione Bicamerale* (Bicameral Committee) for institutional reform was formed, an organizational body that, as its name indicates, is composed of the political parties of both Chambers. Largely as a result of the serious setback suffered by the traditional parties culminating in April 1992's national elections, this body became the crucial - politically contested - institution designed to work on a framework for changes in the institutional and, most importantly for its point of reference, the electoral arrangement of the Italian political system, in order to confront its endemic deficiencies and enhance its democratic qualities<sup>37</sup>.

In the past, the major obstacle to the Commission is achieving substantial results was its politically heterogenous composition, a fact which doomed to failure preceding attempts of similar institutions (The Bicameral Committee was originally established in November 1983, but stopped it work temporarily). In 1985 the Committee indeed presented minor proposals for institutional reform which were, however, never implemented. After this its activity was dormant. With the political crisis of the early 1990s, this Commission was again assigned a critical role in Italian politics. According to the established parties it came to be seen, if not as one of the most promising attempts to overcome some major malfunctions in the contemporary political system, then at least an indicator of the willingness of the established parties to introduce the proclaimed major changes. *De facto*, however, the actual far-reaching reform conducted in 1992 was not the result of this parliamentary Commission. Rather, the transformation of the electoral system was induced by an initiative for plebiscite guided by M. Segni. The institutional reforms finally approved are an enlightening example of the incapacity of the Italian political system to reform itself from the inside. Only the opposition from outside inner-party circles, i.e., massive public protest and a series of referenda on party financing and the system of preferential voting from 1987 onwards, was able to set in motion

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<sup>37</sup> It is not surprising that politicians describe the major tasks of this Commission according to their respective political stand. The ascribed goals range from the attempt to develop a structural solution to the recurrent situation of ungovernability resulting from the fragmentation of the spectrum of political parties (proportional voting system) to the broader claim according to which it should address the problem of the growing detachment of the citizens to the political institutions.

a development capable of overcoming the stalemate of Italian politics<sup>38</sup>. In this respect, the implementation of the majoritarian system 1993 marked a decisively new phase in the institutional history of the First Italian Republic.

In line with this profound reorganization of the institutional setting (change towards the majoritarian system)<sup>39</sup>, the entire political system is likely to undergo a massive transformation. However, even before 1992 new political parties and movement had appeared in the political arena and others had changed their name and political image. Under the impression of the massive loss of legitimation the established party system has entered into a phase of total reorganization<sup>40</sup>. The former Communist Party (PCI) split into the more moderate PDS (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*) oriented towards a social-democrat approach and the still marxist-oriented PRC (*Partito Rifondazione Comunista*) before the revelations about the corruption scandals in 1992. Most affected, however, has been the political center. Here, the traditional parties struggle for political survival. With many of their leading figures under attack for their corruptive practices or, even worse, for collusion with the Mafia (Andreotti, Gava), these parties had disastrous results in recent elections. Against this background in 1992 the DC had to accept the drain generated by the formation of new political actors formerly integrated into Italy's hegemonic catholic party: the leftist *La Rete* under Palermo's mayor L. Orlando and the *Patto per l'Italia* headed by Mario Segni, one of the main protagonists pushing for institutional reform. The Christian Democrats themselves, under the weight of major electoral defeats, have decided to reorganize their party under the name PPI (*Partito Popolare Italiano*) in January 1994. Equally, the neo-fascist MSI is about to be transformed into the broader alliance *Alleanza Nazionale*, adopting the more modest right-wing position, favored by its leader Gianfranco Fini. By rhetorically renouncing their fascist past the right in Italy the MSI/AN has become able to leave the political ghetto by

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<sup>38</sup> See on the consequences of the institutional reforms on the Italian political system and the actual scope of change initiated by them: Hine (1993). In its present state it would be most appropriate to speak with Paul Ginsborg of a 'democratic restoration' rather than of a 'revolution'. There are some who argue that the recent transformations, instead of revolutionizing the Italian political system, might protect crucial aspects of the old order,- quasi as an impenetrable move within the logic of *trasformismo* (Abse 1993).

<sup>39</sup> See on the consequences of the formerly applied one-preference vote for Italian politics: Pasquino (1993).

<sup>40</sup> Being confronted with this deepest crisis of the Italian political system in post-war history politicians and commentators have come to speak about a 'revolutionary situation' which is bringing the first Republic to an end. Along these liners an editorial of the *Economist*, for example, argues that "a revolution is happening in slow motion but nonetheless in the heart of Western Europe, an entire political order is collapsing." (Feb. 20, 1993).

which it was banned by a broad anti-fascist consensus until recently (Ruzza & Schmidtke 1994). Other parties on the center-left have either dissolved themselves (such as the Liberal Party PLI or the Social-democrats PSDI) or, more dramatically, as in the case of the PSI, find themselves on the verge of completely disappearing from the political scene. The leader of the PSI, Craxi, has come to personify illegal practices and the discredited former political elite of the country (Rhodes 1993).

To summarize this brief look at the conditions which have characterized the situation in Italian society and politics during the years of the rise of the Lega: it is against the background of an accelerated delegitimation of the governing political elite in Italy and the resulting realignment of political forces that the 'political opportunity structure' has been conducive to newly emerging political actors and their agenda. In the Italian case we are confronted with long-term structural cleavages and forcefully emerging features of a political crisis which has gained its new political quality by the juridical revelations about *tangentopoli*. The end of the Cold War and the resulting ideological de-polarization between the traditionally dominant forces in Italian politics, provided the fertile grounds for the devastating effects of the campaign *mani pulite*. In short, the ideological de-polarization and the accelerated disintegration of the established party system in Italy opened a political vacuum for new political formations.

The line of argument advanced here is that the reemergence of 'regionalist' politics (as represented by the Lega) has to be seen in the context of the delegitimation of the national political system. It is no coincidence that the rise of the Lega has occurred with the end of a political era which had been dominated by features of a seemingly untouchable hegemony of DC-dominated coalitions. In this respect, the patterns of the Lega's mobilization are essentially linked to the disintegration of national politics. Far from simply indicating the defense of particular ethnic settings and communal rights, the territorial identity is formulated and made subject to political claims in close interaction with the national setting of Italian politics. The collapse of the patronage-based system and the resultant delegitimation of the traditional parties (in particular in the political center) opened opportunities for new political forces with an agenda beyond the established bipolarity in Italian politics. The hypothesis is that in particular a framing strategy which is based on anti-system and anti-party issues found a fertile ground in a political environment shaped by the revelations of *tangentopoli*. In this respect, the dynamic features of the political opportunities are perceived as conditioning the logic of identity construction in the Lega. The regionally framed collective identity is

accordingly interpreted as conflictualized in close response to the opportunities arising from the decline of the bipolar model. In its mobilization the Lega decisively benefitted from the gradual disintegration of established Italian politics in the early 1990s as it simultaneously became a significant agent in this transformation. In the case study, it shall be pointed out how the collective identity and the related political agenda of the Lega effectively reacted upon the gradual decline of Italy's political establishment. Analyzing the conflictualization of the Lega's images of collective identity the thesis will be developed that the Lega's political mobilization has far exceeded what is traditionally known as regionalism.

## Chapter VII

### **From System Opposition to a State Party: The Lega As a Populist Challenge to the Nation-state**

#### **7. Introduction: From Populist Protest to an Agent of System Transformation**

Populist protest groups as persistent collective actors in politics, integrated into the institutionalized decision making process, seem a self-contradictory notion. Their actions are said to be restricted to raising awareness in public to particular issues rather than taking political responsibility themselves. According to mainstream interpretation these groups do not have to be taken seriously as main agents of change in the long run. Most often they are pictured as phenomena that indicate a critical crisis of the present and the need for change without, however, being able to offer a viable solution to political conflicts themselves. Populist protest is normally conceived of as a catalytic force in accelerating the transformation of decision making processes, as a kind of regulative of 'normal politics'. Though questioning the given framework of power, these groups, according to this interpretation, stay outside the crucial core from which political power is exercised. In this context protest groups are mostly portrayed as one-issue movements, vanishing whenever the particular conflict is settled or, more probably, when the public simply loses interest in their action and framing of reality.

The rise of the Northern Italian leagues has been commented along these lines. It has been described as 'just' a protest vote capitalizing upon the corrupt and clientilistic practices of the political establishment that has recently become publically known in its omnipresent dimension. Especially after its first spectacular electoral successes commentators widely agreed upon the assumption that the Lega articulates the diffuse dissatisfaction with the present regime, but lacks any viable programmatic project crucial to any stable political force. Hence, it was supposed that, due to the transitory nature of protest behavior, this 'populist outburst' will necessarily deteriorate.

On a general level such an interpretation is supported by the evidence of the fate of the vast majority of protest groups. Most forms of protest behavior are unable to stay in the public eye as they do not politicize their concerns effectively. If, however, such a collective actor becomes too successful, thus jeopardizing seriously potent interests, then established political forces usually move to incorporate the debated issue into their own agenda and thereby appease the rebellious claims (to a certain extent this happened to the environmental issue). Both strategies, the repressive and the cooperative one, effectively avoid risking the hold on power by promoting a forceful integration of the debated issues into the official

agenda. Rarely are protest groups able to change the political culture and very seldomly are they able or willing to establish themselves as a main actor on the political stage.

However, predictions about the Lega were wrong; it did not follow the marked life-cycle of protest groups and disappear as quickly as it emerged. It has not only become the strongest political force in northern Italy, and, for a time in the early 1990s, the third party nationally, replacing the PSI, but it also has become a driving political agent in preparing an institutional reform that has changed the Italian political landscape radically and will continue to do so. In doing so, the Lega has turned from a fundamental opposition against established parties and the central state's agencies into an organization that, first took responsibility in communal administration and that, since spring 1994, has become a decisive part of the conservative national government under Berlusconi. It has become the leading force in the self-transformation of a political system which for a long time it had attacked unyieldingly. In a comparative perspective the Lega represents one of the exceptional cases in which 'system opposition' has been (conflictually) integrated into the altering institutionalized framework of state agencies. In this respect the rise of the Lega is part of a process in Italian politics in the course of which the entire system has been subject to profound change. This poses more far-reaching theoretical questions in interpreting this political actor than suggested in the notion of 'protest politics'.

There have been public interpretations of the rise of the Lega ranging from a right-wing, racist party along the lines of the French *Front Nationale* or the German *Republikaner*, as it was described in terms of a resurgence of regionalism, to a fragile protest movement. The guiding hypothesis advanced in the following however is that none of these general labels provide a promising tool in interpreting Lega appropriately. While none of the argumentations is totally wrong, it shall be argued that it is not possible to come to terms with the Lega through these general characteristics. Reality has proven to be more complex than these classifications. What has been most confusing in this respect, and can hence be identified as a main reason for the conceptual vagueness, is that the Lega has dramatically changed its political alliances and standpoints. The Lega's mobilization history can be described as a history of constant and profound change in its political identity.

This instability is, according to the argumentation advanced here, the expression of the very essence of the Lega as a populist movement. The programmatic and strategic orientation of the Lega has been primarily shaped by newly emerging opportunities rather than by fixed political alignments and programmatic issues. The line of argument is that this flexibility in

conducting its oppositional stand on the basis of a territorially defined collective identity has been the main source of the Lega's success as at same time it has become the critical determinant of the difficulties, the Lega now faces in sustaining its political success. What we have witnessed in 1994 general elections - the first major setback for the Lega after a seemingly irresistible rise - has, as will be explained in the course of this study, its roots in the specific dynamic to be found in populist mobilization itself. In this respect one could legitimately doubt the thesis of the Lega as a successful 'anti-system' political agent. It is in fact not totally out of place to argue that the most recent development of the Lega might indicate that the transformation from system opposition to a state party has actually been performed as a clever integration into the prevailing system's reproductive logic<sup>1</sup>.

### 7.1. Features of Mobilization in the Northern Leagues

The figures of the Lega's electoral success as documented in Table I give the impression of a steady rise. Behind these figures, however, there are intermissions denoting new cycles in political mobilization and the adoption of revised strategic options in political struggle. Parallel to this, the Lega itself substantially changed in the course of the ten years of its political mobilization. It is worth emphasizing that organizationally and ideologically it has undergone a metamorphosis in its political identity, which is exceptional even for a protest movement. In the following the thesis will be advanced that this continual adaption to newly emerging political opportunities is far from being casual and superficial to the type of mobilization originated by the Lega.

As explained in the theoretical section of this work, the analysis of the political mobilization of the Lega departs from the hypothesis that the formation of a binding collective identity can be taken as the legitimating ground and hence as the essential condition for the formation of a new collective actor. Particularly for a territorial movement quasi created *ex nihilo*, it was decisive to establish this crucial reference point for its political claims in order to become identifiable as a serious political actor, competing for public recognition and political credibility. In the following, analytical attention will accordingly be given to the processes by which this collective identity was generated, by which constitutive elements it is composed, how it was politicized and subsequently transformed in accordance with the changing opportunity structure in Italian politics.

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<sup>1</sup> For this aspect see the discussion at the end of this chapter.

The guiding thesis in interpreting the Lega is thus that this form of territorial politics can only be adequately grasped if perceived as a phenomenon subject to constant qualitative change. The electoral results as such give only a very synoptic picture of the Lega's rise. These figures have to be interpreted in their specific context for their political meaning to be understood. Only by applying such a perspective, does the dynamic in the Lega's

political mobilization, its successive qualitative transformation, become perceivable. Any stationary, strictly macro-structurally generated interpretation must, as the vast majority of interpretations on the Lega illustrate, fail to grasp the specific political character of this new phenomenon in Italian politics.

In applying such an interpretative perspective, it is important to be aware that the successive transformation of its political identity has had major ramifications on the form and content of the Lega's political mobilization. In order to shed analytical light on the changing features in this process, on the development from a rather unstructured and ideologically inexperienced protest behaviour to the formation of a national political force, the rise of the Lega will be looked at by referring to four distinct periods. Each of these four phases denotes a distinct period of the Lega's political mobilization. In every phase of the political mobilization that was generated by the Lega, attention will be given to the construction of a specific collective identity and the related framing process.

At the end of each there is a significant change in the political opportunity structure, mostly in the form of key events, modifying those parameters which until then had conditioned the Lega's mobilizing efforts. In these periods of re-orientation the Lega adopted new strategic options, redefining its framing of reality, determining new political goals and targeting new groups meant to be integrated into the own political project.

Opening up possibilities for a renewed cycle of mobilization in these periods of transformation, the Lega also had to cope with critical challenges to its overarching collective identity. Major strategic changes in mobilization necessarily involve an amplification or, more radically, a reformulation of this integrating ideological reference point of the collective actor.

**Table I** Electoral results of the Lega 1987-1994  
(Percentage points of total vote)

Elections	Italy	Lombardy
National '87	1.3%	3.8%
European '89	1.8%	8.1%
Regional '90	5.4%	18.9%
National '92	8.6%	23.0%
National '94	8.4%	23.8%

As theoretically explicated above, a collective identity determines the range of political goals and strategies perceived as legitimate and mobilizing by the assigned constituency. Each of the historically distinct phases of the Lega's mobilization hence involves a critical attempt to re-interpret the overarching collective identity in making it compatible with the changing political opportunities and correspondingly formulated goals, on the one hand, and the expectations of its assigned electorate on the other hand. It is, however, worth noting that, identifying these phases, the Lega is somewhat spuriously taken as a homogenous political actor. In fact, the Lega is composed of geographically localized different political aspirations generating a political mobilization with respectively distinct features of the electorate's incentives and the political agenda. Focusing on the Lega's publications and campaigns it is nevertheless possible to historically identify dominant characteristics of its engagement beyond the internal differences, which are indeed salient.

Four of these phases will be analytically distinguished:

1. The phase of latency (1979-87); 2. the phase of consolidation, i.e., the formation of a coherent political actor (1987-90); 3. the phase of populist success (1990-92); and 4. the phase of institutionalization understood as the rapprochement to the political system, resulting in the Lega's participation in national government (1992-94).

In each of these phases the integrating collective identity sets the range of feasible options for the mobilization advanced. The concrete features of the respective mobilization cycle are respectively denoted by the main elements in political discourse and the related content of the political campaigns pursued in this period. In each phase the mobilizing effort of the Lega is situated in a particular socio-political context with a historically distinct opportunity structure for this new agent in Italian politics. As the analysis will show, the transformation takes place when the overarching legitimating ground and political rationale, the collective identity, no longer effectively matches these opportunities and the political consciousness of the targeted population. Anticipating the findings of the empirical inquiry, the characteristic features of each of the mobilizing phases are documented in table II (p.148). Here it is shown how each constellation of the collective identity finds its expression in and is confirmed by a particular political discourse and political opportunities.

Not every social movement is equally dependent on the dynamic features of the established political system and the emerging opportunities for mobilization. Regarding my research interest it is, however, worth stressing that populist movements are by definition substantially shaped by the opportunities determined by the performance of established

political forces. Unlike social movements that are defined by relatively steady key issues the success of populist actors substantially depends on the delegitimization of the political establishment. Whereas the former type of protest is centered more on the long-term salience of certain social problems/ issues (the higher the complexity of these problems, the more persistent movements tend to be as a relatively independent political force), the latter populist one is in essence modeled in response to the changing features resulting from the conflict with traditional parties and politicians. The political identity of populist actors such as the Lega is predominantly constituted in conflictual interactions with old and newly emerging parties<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For example Kriesi differentiates in this context between 'conjunctural' and 'linear' NSMs the latter being much less determined by factors of the political environment. He explains: "The extent to which a movement's trajectory depends on the POS is a function of its general orientation, of the level of development of its organizational infrastructure, and of the structure of the problem it is dealing with." (Kriesi, 1991: 31)

**Table II: Mobilization periods of the Lega regarding certain characteristics of its political offer**

Phase	1979-87 'phase of latency'	1987-1990 'phase of consolidation'	1990-92 'phase of populist success'	92- date; 'institutionalization'
Key Elements in collective identity	Ethnoregionalism; territory as source of political and cultural identity	Neo-regionalism; territory as a reference for socio-economic interests (shared work ethics)	Communitarian populism; antagonism to the institutions and established parties in name of Northern value community	Lega as agent of 'revolutionary' change of national political system; North as blueprint for Italian society
Main elements in political discourse	'Localism', fear of economic decline; disintegration of DC's hegemony in north	Opposition north-south; protest against inefficiency of public services, intolerance vers. immigration	Fight against dominance of nation-state agencies and traditional parties; Project of three macro-regions	Institutional reforms; Fight against <i>partitocrazia</i> , Opposition against First Republic
Main political content of Campaigns/ Protest	Strengthening of local networks and 'regional' cultural identity	Protest against drain of resources from productive north; fight centralism exercised by Roman parties	Tax revolt; Opposition against Roman parties	Protest against discredited political establishment; call for institutional reforms
Socio-political Context/ Political Opportunities	Crisis in DC dominated <i>zone bianche</i> , socio-economic change in small business	Lega underestimated by traditional parties; blocked political system	Crisis of Socialist party; depolarization of political system	Corruption scandals, disintegration of established party system, major institutional changes; Lega enters national government
Localization of vote	Veneto and Northern Lombardy	Decline in Veneto increase in Piemonte	Decisive breakthrough in Lombardy, increase in entire north	Major success in 92' general elections and successive local elections in north; first set-back in 94' elections in center and south
Characteristics of electorate	Male, young people from rural areas; low education; workers in small business	Increase in level of education and urbanization amongst Lega's electorate	'Normalization' of electorate's profile, predominance of male and peripheral strata	Lega's voters show increasingly characteristics of population's average

### 7.1.1. Key elements in the Lega's political discourse

A critical focus of my analysis is the ideological framing with which the collective actor seeks to enter into public discourse in a politically relevant way. Not only are issues conflictualized but, intimately related, the collective identity is also made a reference point for collective action via these communicative processes. To analyze the change in this field of the Lega's engagement it is necessary to first give a synoptic account of the Lega's overall framing of reality, which shapes in general the Lega's political discourse.

The more the Lega advanced in its mobilization history the more its programmatic orientations became more outspoken. With the electoral successes and the organizational consolidation, the twelve points of the original (and still valid) key programme of the Lega (documented in the appendix), outlining the main political goals, became increasingly subject to more detailed proposals for political change. The first years are hereby characterized by three related aspects of a political fight against the centralized nation-state with distinct features of political reasoning and consequently formulated political goals: on the one hand, there is the explicit reference to an ethnic identity and the related claim for cultural self-determination as the main ground for political mobilization. On the basis of these accordingly legitimated claims for regional self-determination socio-economic and political rights of which the regional community is said to be deprived are thematized. In these areas the structure of the centralized nation-state is said to frustrate the region's legitimate rights in socio-economic entitlement as well as the rights for political participation. On universalistic grounds the very legitimacy of citizenship based on the integration into the national community community is questioned here.

Between the three fields in which the Lega portrays Lombardy to be discriminated against and in which it hence strives for improving the communities rights are only partly on the same level. The emphasis on cultural identity primarily defines a field of social and political conflict with clearly competing entitlement between different communal groups. More broadly, however, cultural identity, the process of assigning to a community a commonly shared meaning and consequently shared interests and rights, can be seen as the constitutive element in the center-periphery conflict. By precedingly furnishing a strong sense of collective identity as the critical pre-political resource in collective action, it produces the legitimation for the claimed rights formulated in the economic and political realm.

The three fields in which Lombardy or the north is represented as being discriminated against have their common denominator in a distinct discourse which furnishes the

legitimizing resources and incentives for the Lega's engagement: the structural injustice intrinsic to any centralized nation-state in general and the Italian state in particular. The political campaigns of the Lega are indeed all built on the dominant frame suggesting the image of the threatened and dispossessed territorially assigned collective entity. The 'Lombard' community is illustrated as being deceived by outside forces, of which the nation-state and, more particularly, its main representatives, the Roman-based parties and politicians are the most important protagonists. The antagonism between the indigenous values, mastery and economic achievements of Lombardy on the one hand and the injustice and incompetence endemic to the contemporary Italian nation-state on the other, is the overarching interpretative scheme uniting the different points of the Lega's programme. The above-mentioned strong sense of illegitimate deprivation structurally rooted in the given power structure is the driving force in the political campaign of the Lega. The proposed overarching political solutions consistently follow from this notion of an 'unjust and parasitic' state.

Against this background the political discourse of the Lega itself can best be examined by characterizing it as being clustered around the following thematic fields. Identifying these it is crucial to keep in mind that in the Lega's campaigns the emphasis on the concrete framing of the issue of themes also substantially changes over time. In the mobilization history different importance is given to each of these thematic fields. In interpreting the mobilizing dynamics generated by the Lega particular attention shall be given to how and why the Lega's discourse changes given the shifts in its integrating collective identity. The core thematic fields of the Lega's political discourse are the following:

### 1. Socio-economic rights:

- a. Fiscal injustice and mismanagement/ transfer of state resources to the south;
- b. Waste of public resources and the malfunction of public services (Discrimination against small and medium size enterprise).

### 2. Political rights:

- a. Protest against the political establishment and *partitocrazia*;
- b. Threat of *meridionalization* ('Southernization') and fight against the mafia.

### 3. Cultural rights:

- a. Fight for 'ethnic/ cultural' self-determination in the fields of education, mass media and lingual questions;
- b. Fight against immigration and threat of 'disintegration' of the own society.

### *1a. Fiscal injustice/ transfer of state resources to the south*

The starting point of the Lega's protest was the classic regionalist concern about political and economic discrimination from which Lombardy is said to suffer. Pointing to the notably different levels of industrial development and the unequal distribution of state resources between the regions of Italy, a political agenda is established that until the rise of the Lega had not played a significant role in Italian politics. The center-periphery conflict is framed in a simplistic way: Lombardy and the productive north pays those state resources which are often unproductively and inefficiently consumed in Rome and the south.

Consequently the political program of the Lega is primarily formulated as a refusal of the politics performed in Rome, the administrative and political center of the Italian nation-state. The most important issue is the drain of financial resources from Lombardy, which the national government is accused of promoting. According to the picture drawn by the Lega, the economically successful northern regions are obliged to pay unjustifiably high taxes without a reasonable return. The national government is portrayed as wasting the money on continually unsuccessful projects in the *mezzogiorno*, from which the Mafia, above all, profits. Generally the Lega states that the taxes of those citizens who actually pay them drain away into undefinable channels. Particularly in the formative phase of the Lega's mobilization, before emphasizing federalism as a nationally applicable solution, the northern leagues explicitly questioned the commitment of national government towards the south. Being univocally accepted by all traditional parties in Italian politics it was not until the rise of the Lega that the duty to instigate a similar social and economic development throughout the country was put into question. One crucial point of the Lega's political program is in this respect, a thorough reform of the supposedly unjust tax-system demanding a far-reaching independence of every region in raising and spending its own revenues<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, it pushes for the abolition of a law guaranteeing the same income for the same job arguing that different costs of living require an according differentiation in salaries.

As symbolically communicated in figure I Lombardy or the north with its productivity is pictured as a hen laying golden eggs that end up in the enormous and insatiable bag of the

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<sup>3</sup> See: Ecco come la Lega vuole governare l'Italia, Handout of the Lega Lombarda, Europeo 49/ 6.Dec., 1991. In its fight against the tax-burden the Lega often makes use of a highly suggestive comparison: often one can find in its propaganda the reference to the *Val d'Aosta* where fuel, due to the special status of the region, costs only a fraction of the normal price in Italy. It is suggested that in Lombardy the situation would change equally substantially after being freed from the Roman 'tax-dictate'. More broadly, with respect to a concept of economic policy, the Lega's ideas are vague; besides a general reference to British neo-conservative policy of deregulation and privatization as a possible blueprint for Lombardy, no detailed conception can be found.

southern Italian housewife. Unlike in the first posters published by the Lega in its formative stage, here a clear political destination and an indubitable adversary are specified. The message is unmistakable: the producers and the southerners get fat off the fruits of their northern fellowmen's work. Although apparently playing with popular prejudices its message can be described as a *rational* metaphor for a situation in which the wealth is withheld from the region where it is produced (the term 'rational' does not necessarily signify the truth of this reproach, but simply the fact that it refers to the principle of *justice* as an integral part of the cultural dominant notion of rationality compared to an open racist framing).

The conflict is here pictured as the antagonism between the hard working north and the "lazy and sluggish south" the latter deliberately seeking to profit from the rich Lombardy in a parasitic way.

Over time there is, however, a notable shift in framing in this issue. Originally described in terms of a self-generated incapacity of the *mezzogiorno* blaming the south for its backwardness, since the early 1990s this part of the *peninsula* has increasingly been pictured as a victim of the centralized nation-state. As the Lega formulated its own political aspirations for the south, underdevelopment was now treated more along the lines of colonialism: the resource payments and state programmes are basically seen as a systematic strategy to preserve a state of dependence and to restrain the indigenous potential for development. It is hence not by accident that on the poster documented in figure II the woman from the *mezzogiorno*, symbolizing attitudes and a lifestyle supposedly widespread in the south, is replaced by politicians from the old nomenclature. The centralized structure of the Italian nation-state is still responsible for the drain of resources from the north. However, now it is not the mentality of southerners as such but the politicians<sup>4</sup> operations, their strategy to enrich themselves and to protect their power base, that are blamed for the



Figure 1 Poster of the Lega used from the late 1980s onwards

<sup>4</sup> In this picture you can see Amato, Craxi and Andreotti, with particularly the latter two perceived as the key representatives of the 'old regime'.

waste of money and effort in the south.

Besides these points concerning the institutional setting the Lega proclaims that the political power of the region should be used to promote the interests of its citizens in different fields. Public services, industrial and labor policy, the health system and the old age-pension scheme, as well as the agricultural policy should be reorganized in accordance with the needs and preferences of the people in Lombardy. This includes forms of positive discrimination 'on an ethnic-regional basis', i.e., for example giving the local population (or Lombard emigrants) a guarantee of employment or housing<sup>5</sup>.

*1b. Waste of public resources and the malfunction of public services (Discrimination against small and medium size enterprise)*

The problems of eminently insufficient public services and administrative agencies is not a new phenomenon in Italian society. Public health care, the post and telephone services are amongst the least efficient in Europe. With the rise of the Lega, however, these problems have been made the subject of public discourse in politically conflictual terms. The inefficient use of public resources and the hardship created by a babylonian bureaucracy is interpreted by the Lega as an integral part of the delegitimized centralized nation-state and its agents. The virtue of the northern European work ethic is hereby polemically contrasted with southern assistentialism. 'Foreign' forces take over administration and systematically discriminate against the indigenous population. In the first issue of Lombardia Autonomista Bossi wrote the following:

All the centers of bureaucracy, all the public offices, all the functions of state administration in Lombardy are decreasingly in the hands of Lombards. The entire allocation of accommodation does not only not favor our people but foreigners are in fact privileged vis-à-vis ourselves.



Figure 2 Poster of the Lega used in the 1994's electoral campaign

<sup>5</sup> More concretely, the Lega requests in this context the socio-economic rights already conceded to the regions with 'special status'. In the latter regions, accommodation and employment are distributed according to quota providing the basis on which the entitlements of the single ethnic groups are determined.

This is where the strong emphasis in the Lega's campaigns on market and managerial skills come in. The problem of the cumbersome bureaucracy and the inefficiency of public services are interpreted by the antagonism between the competent, but powerless single citizen and the lavish state apparatus. Competence in civil society is polemically contrasted with the inadequacy endemic to the centralized nation-state and its institutions. The Lega's plea for a strict market economy and the dismantlement of the state have to be seen in this context. Decentralization and privatization are the means by which the Lega proposes enhancing the quality of public services; health services, pensions and the education system being of particular concern for the Lega.

In a wider perspective the economic crisis and the accompanying problems of unemployment and social hardship are framed conferring the overarching image of a highly deficient state. Monocausally Italy's most severe problems are traced back to the party dominated state apparatus accusing it of systematically frustrating private initiative and being responsible for the country's backwardness in a European perspective. According to the Lega's interpretation the principal political responsibility can be found in the practices of the established parties. The argument is as follows: the governing parties base their electoral success mainly on a southern electorate whose political loyalty is secured via the public sector and the resources available in it. Instead of using public resources to enhance the efficiency and quality of public services they are mainly designated to mobilize electoral support for the political establishment.

### *2a. Protest against the political establishment and partitocrazia*

On the basis of the discourse on the systematic fiscal injustice which the north is said to suffer, the political rights are formulated in antagonistic terms to the 'enemies' in the nation-state institutions. The political approach of the Lega is hereby based on two main pillars: firstly, on the protest against the Roman political establishment and its main representatives, namely, the national parties; secondly, as an alternative to the existing political system, it is based upon the unyielding call for a strong federal order with a high degree of independence for the single (macro-) region. Whether such an order is supposed to be compatible with a unified Italian nation-state or whether it supposes the dissolution of the existing national institutional framework remains open. The two agendas, the anti nation-state and the anti-party campaigns, in fact merge into each other, identifying the old political establishment as the responsible agent of the oppressive centralized nation-state. This is

reflected in Bossi's notion of "*centralismo partitocratico*", defined as the main enemy<sup>6</sup>.

In its critique of the political establishment the Lega follows an until recently dominant strategy in polarizing political debates. Irrespective of ideological differences, parties and professional politicians are portrayed as discredited and delegitimized to represent the interests of the northern people<sup>7</sup>. The logic is thus: parties are all alike because they are in the first place Roman and hence representatives of the centralized nation-state. Being part of the established nomenclature supersedes every ideological difference in terms of a left-right split. According to this perspective they are equally engaged in draining the resources from Lombardy and benefiting from the 'honest work' of its citizens.

The term *partitocrazia* connects the widespread discontent with public services with the protest against an unresponsive and 'arrogant' party system which is accused of channeling public resources to its political clients. In the political agitation of the Lega Lombarda the notion of *i partiti romani* (Roman parties) in its pejorative meaning stands for the general protest against the way politics is run in Rome. It is crucial for the Lega to present itself as a political force distinctively different from those in power. Thus, many observers have noted that the leagues are simply a passing protest vote outside the institutionalized framework of power and hence without lasting political consequences. However, the protest is directed against the core of the present political system and its representatives. This includes not only all traditional parties but also main institutions such as the press<sup>8</sup>, television, big business and, to a certain degree, the church. With its clear-cut federalist program and its anti-party stand, the Lega expresses a far-reaching challenge to traditional, Rome-centered political practice. The issues high on the Lega's political agenda respond effectively to the widespread dislike of state politics; in one of its publications the

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<sup>6</sup> Bossi, 'L'autonomia dei popoli', in: Lombardia Autonomista, No.1.

<sup>7</sup> Francesco Speroni, at this time head of the Lega at the Senate and now minister in Rome, phrased this irreconcilable opposition to the Roman representatives in the name of the north: "The Lombard nation has reopened the fight against the enemy, against anyone who seeks to impose his will upon us Lombards from outside. In fact, the methods have changed: no longer the barricade, but an active and democratic militancy in order to constrain the representatives of the Lombard people to oppose the oppression by the Roman parties by the means of a free and conscious vote." (Lombardia Autonomista, No.7., 15.7.1989)

<sup>8</sup> The fight against the mass media supposedly loyal to the 'old regime' is in fact one of the main arguments with which the Lega denotes its subcultural standing. As it is reflected in one of its older slogans: "A democratic state has an independent press not one controlled by the parties." (Lombardia Autonomista, No.20, 1988). Even today, as for example at this May's meeting at Pontida, Bossi speaks of the "regime media", accusing it of constantly attacking the Lega.

main idea behind federalism is described as "the primacy of society over the state."<sup>9</sup> With its campaigns for decentralization, the Lega claims that it makes the policy process more responsive to the concrete needs of the people.

There is a particular dynamic at work in the political emergence of the Lega: its main political concerns were and still are pragmatic, and do not attack the fundamentals of Italian politics. However, because of the number and the scope of the forms of protest the impression has been created that the entire political system in Italy is under siege and that the Lega is the advocate of a thorough institutional reform of Italian politics. This 'national perspective', which at least strategically is developed by the Lega, is to a large extent alien to traditional regional movements.

#### *2b. Threat of 'meridionalization' and fight against the mafia.*

Particularly in the period when the crisis of the political system was not yet so rampant and the Roman nomenclature had not yet become the focal point of the Lega's campaigns, the attacks against the south and what it supposedly represents were perfectly designed to fuel its mobilization. The Lega used anti-southern feelings to make resentments a subject of politicization, which are part of the well established cultural identity of northern Italy. Unlike a regionally defined collective identity the animosity towards the *mezzogiorno* is a stable socio-cultural variable by which people in the north define themselves. Before the rise of the Lega the immense cultural and socio-economic differences between the highly modern north and the south of Italy as one of the most backward regions in Europe has not been become an important political cleavage. The *questione meridionale* (the southern question) has hegemonically been interpreted as a common problem to be solved in a solidary national effort.

In the political discourse of the Lega, the south with its mentality and practices becomes, on the contrary, a genuine threat to an intact community. The *mezzogiorno* has in effect been presented as the very antipode to the way of life expressed by the values in the north. In socio-psychological terms, this was instrumental in strengthening the sense of togetherness in the north by pointing out the unbridgeable dissimilarity with life in Sicily, Calabria or in Basilicata. The south is particularly framed as a threat where it comes to the control of political power and economic resources. Along these lines the situation in northern Italy is portrayed by the Lega as one characterized by colonizing aspirations of the south

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<sup>9</sup> *Repubblica del Nord*, Publication of the Lega, 1990, p.9.

exercising its dominance via the nation-state's institutions<sup>10</sup>. Being solidly rooted in a common feeling amongst people from the north of Italy, the image of a forceful 'meridionalization' of the country has become an effective resource in mobilization<sup>11</sup>.

Beyond political aspirations in the narrow sense of the meaning, the southern people, often cleverly pictured as endemically linked with the mafia, are said to breed all those problems from which Italian society suffers: corruption, organized crime, inefficiency etc. Vimercati's (1990) definition of the major 'enemies' of the Lombard people is revealing in indicating how this relation between features of malfunction in public life and the

supposedly 'colonizing' southern mentality is framed: "the inefficiency of the state, the violence of the parties, the excessive fiscal pressure, the mentality *terrona* (invective for southerner) that is under this perspective synonymous with lethargy, 'scoundrelness' and cleverness" (Vimercati 1990:48)<sup>12</sup>. The poster to be seen in figure III shows how the mafia, in the formative years often equated with the south, should be perceived as a creeping threat consuming one's own soil and property<sup>13</sup>. In this respect the anti-southern sentiments are not restricted to the realm of social or political rights but formulate a wider interpretative frame.



Figure 3 Poster of the Lega presenting anti-southern feelings

<sup>10</sup> As G. Miglio, the former ideological head of the Lega put it, "the north is already corrupted by the south that wants an 'assistentialist' state." (in: "Miglio getta la spugna", *LaRepubblica*, January 12, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> In the formative period of the Lega this question was strongly framed in ethnic terms: "In a situation like the Italian one in which the ethnic majority is southern it is sufficient that one single party extends its sphere of influence to the entire territory of the state. Thus it automatically becomes a southern dominated party and hence one that predominantly acts in the interests of the south... Goodbye, southern colonialism." In: *Lombardia Autonomista*, Supp. No.6, 1986.

<sup>12</sup> See on this point of the hegemony of the south and the colonizing aspirations of Rome: *Lombardia Autonomista*, No.8, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> This opposition between the 'honest', hard-working North and the 'corrupt', lavish South is reflected in of the Lega's slogans: "Soldi dal nord, mafia dal sud" (Money from the North, Mafia from the South).

### *3a. Fight for 'ethnic/ cultural' self-determination in the fields of education, mass media and lingual questions*

For generating consensus for political mobilization the Lega has employed a collective identity with strong communal features. In order to see how the 'usually apolitical feeling for one's home and region' (Snyder, 1982:140), and the belonging to a territorially defined community are transformed into a political movement, one has to consider how the relation between the 'We' and the 'Other' is defined in conflictual terms. Group identity is essentially an awareness of one's distinctiveness from others. This differentiation becomes politically significant when it is used for strategies of exclusion of dissimilar groups and hence for discriminatory practices. Thus, it is necessary to see how a distinct 'Lombard' cultural identity is utilized politically by the Lega in legitimating its particularistic regionalist claims.

This topic is initially very much framed along the lines of the classical theory of alienation. Bossi speaks in the first programmatic issue of Lombardia Autonomista (No.1 1982) about "his people" being only a "mass of people, deprived of a political identity, anonymously incorporated into a declining nation-state." The deprivation of Lombards' indigenous values and culture, to rephrase Bossi, can be seen as the very source for the state of disorder and resulting dissatisfaction in the regional community. The 'Italianization' most prominently presented by targeted standardization of cultural differences is said to lie at the basis of the crisis of the nation-state. In fact, the language as the classical agenda of regionalism retained until the late 1980s a prominent place in the Lega's campaigns<sup>14</sup>

Next to the issue of the regional 'language'<sup>15</sup>, cultural questions are touched upon in the Lega's founding program only in one point, which, however, is crucial. In its formative period the Lega energetically asked for a revival of the Lombard culture and language and its systematic diffusion in the educational system (article 7 of the Lega Lombardia's programme; see appendix). Schools and the university are considered a "fundamental instrument in the fight against the Roman colonialism that inserts its representatives in commanding posts of our society."<sup>16</sup> In general, Lombardy's unique cultural identity is taken

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<sup>14</sup> In Lombardia Autonomista (No. 8-12) even 1989 it says: "The language is one of the most precious instruments to be preserved. And to conserve a language it is necessary to teach it in school, to speak it in public offices, acknowledging its dignity and granting it an official value. .... *We are Lombards and we want to stay Lombards!* (last part in dialect/ O.S.)"

<sup>15</sup> Franco Rocchetta, former leader of the Liga Veneta, explicitly insists on the expression 'language' instead of dialect, characterizing its difference to standard Italian.

<sup>16</sup> In: Lombardia Autonomista, No1, 1982.

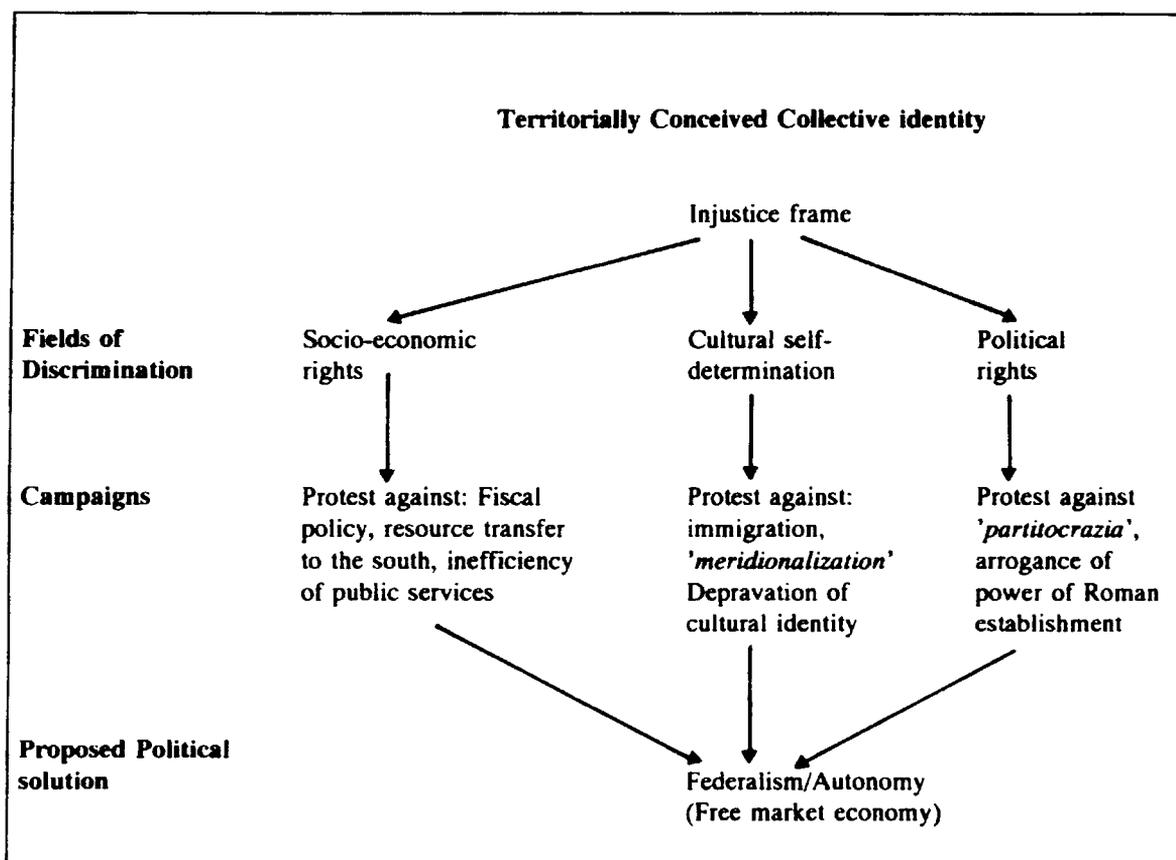
as a given feature in the program that, although under attack from colonizing aspirations, can be referred to as the legitimating ground and guiding principle in defining the region's political aspirations.

*3b. Fight against immigration and threat of 'disintegration' of society.*

As long as the local context was the main reference point of mobilizing efforts and the main socializing agents for new activists, the predominantly self-referential affirmation of the Lega's collective identity was satisfactory. Going politically beyond this localist setting and adopting a regionalist agenda, however, meant increasingly relying on more 'abstract' processes in constructing the indispensable sense of commonalty. This is the background against which the growing emphasis on the 'other' is to be seen. The demarcation from the south and the values as well as the culture and socio-economic model represented by the *mezzogiorno* provided an easy and, in Italian society, well established starting point for defining regional identity.

Alluding to the notion of a threatened homogeneity of the Lombard people the national government is accused of pursuing an immigration policy which threatens to neglect the rights of Lombards who should enjoy priority. The binary typology between 'Us' and 'Them' as the legitimating ground on which membership to the Lombard community is defined and by which exclusory practices are rationalized in its changing features lies at the very core of the Lega's mobilization efforts. The related political goals are guided by the general notion 'Lombardy first' proposing a restrictive attitude toward the foreign labor force and immigrants. Thus in 1990 Bocca saw in the vote for the Lega a condensed picture of the widespread racism of Italian society vis-à-vis immigration (Bocca 1990: 28). In the chapter on the racist elements of the Lega (chapter 7.4.3.3.) a close examination will be made of one of the Lega's political campaigns which, according to some observers, have been among the most effective political moves generating widespread support in the north of Italy.

Figure 4 summarizes the main features of the Lega's campaigns, documenting the integrating point of departure in its political mobilization. The integrating feature is the collective identity on the basis of which the notion of a collectivity with distinct political rights and aspirations is formulated. Politicizing these features of communal belonging there is a strong notion of injustice vis-à-vis the people in the north. This general ideological reference point in interpreting reality constitutes the need for collective and individual action. The sense of being



**Figure 4** The general design of the Lega's political discourse

structurally deprived of one's legitimate entitlement is the basis of the Lega's political discourse. Nation-state agencies and representatives as well as the *mezzogiorno* are blamed for having established a hegemonic power block, and frustrating the aspirations of the 'honest and hard working' communities in the north. This perception of reality, quasi interchangeable in the respective patterns of the argument, is related to different fields of social and political life. The mono-causal argumentative design in identifying the claimed suppression finds its expression in the suggested solution. The defense of the indigenous rights of the territorially defined community, regardless of internal cleavages, is said to be the integrating political aspiration of the Lega. In 1987 Bossi gave the following explanation of 'his' movements:

We define ourselves as the political movement that incarnates the popular Lombard will. We are definitely not a traditional party because we do not intend to represent the interests of a particular group or even of a specific class, but we are a movement that represents the interests of all Lombards who today have the common interest to strive for the autonomy of Lombardy.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Bossi 'Il primato dei popoli', in: *Lombardia Autonomista*, No.2, 1987,

All the elements of the Lega's political discourse are present: the superiority and primacy of a territorially defined identity vis-à-vis class based approaches, the supremacy and qualitative difference of a 'movement' such as the Lega in comparison with traditional parties and the redefinition of political interests as a consequence of the binding collective identity as a Lombard. In the course of its mobilization the Lega essentially changed the emphasis on these particular issues. At the above indicated key points of transformation even the integrating collective identity became subject to change, legitimating new strategic political decisions and reconciling the political discourse with the newly targeted supporters. As will be shown later, especially in the mature phase of the Lega's mobilization history the claim of regional autonomy, formerly determining, is gradually replaced by a wide concept of federalism and a free market ideology<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> See in this respect the discussion in chapter 7.4.3.1

## 7.2. Mobilization History: the Formative Years (1979-87)

Looking at the mobilization history of the Lega it is first of all striking that this organization was consolidated and firmly established only at a relatively late stage. Initially and lasting until the mid 1980s, what is today known as the Lega Nord basically consisted of, if at all, a loosely connected network of single attempts to assign political meaning to a local or partially regional identity and related political issues. The political aspirations in Veneto, Lombardy and Piemonte, the first geographical strongholds of the Lega, were, however, far from identical. Each initiative was largely shaped by the specific cultural, social and political conditions in the particular province or region. In this formative period the capacity to generate a noteworthy political mobilization was in fact frustrated by the locally restricted range of the Lega's activities. At this stage it would hence be misleading to speak of a coherent and homogenous political actor. Rather than being an enlargement of a core group of activists the roots of the Lega can thus be identified in a disperse set of localist activities only very weakly united by organizational ties.

The primary of these localist mobilization efforts that had a notable political electoral success was the Liga Veneta, the - as it was framed by its former leader Francesco Rocchetta - 'mother of all the leagues'. This was the main protagonist of the newly emerging leagues in Northern Italy, attracting support in a traditional stronghold of the DC. In the general elections in 1983, in Veneto it won over 4% of the valid vote with peaks of 6-7% in some provinces, conquering a seat in both the *Camera dei Deputati* (Parliament) and the Senate. With the internal fights of the 1980s that gave rise to a competing organization, the *Unione del Popolo Veneto* (UVP), however, the rise of the Liga Veneta came to an abrupt halt. The consequence was that the Liga Veneta lost almost half of its votes in the next general elections in 1987.

It was during this period of the internal split of the Liga Veneta and its consequential weakening that the Lega Lombarda, led by Umberto Bossi, took the lead in the advancement of the leagues. Having worked for this organization since 1979 the charismatic leader founded the Lombard League formally in 1982. In his political project for Lombardy Bossi was strongly inspired by the leader of a small and established Northern Italian independence movement: the *Union Valdotaïne* of Bruno Salvadori. It was this historic leader of the French autonomist party who convinced Bossi to fight politically for regionalist ambitions<sup>19</sup>. As a

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<sup>19</sup> At this point Bossi was in his mid thirties studying medicine '*fuori corso*', an education he never completed.

result, the early political campaigns of the Lega were an outspoken attempt to transplant the 'ethno-regionalist' agenda of the Aosta-valley to other regions of northern Italy.

Initially as the *Lega Autonomista Lombarda* this political organization existed only as an alliance of a handful of activists without any noticeable public influence in the first half of the 1980s. It acquired some visibility in 1985, when it first competed in the electoral arena. Initially, it participated in a few local elections and obtained 2.5 per cent of the valid votes in the province of Varese. Single cities such as Varese, Bergamo or Como were indeed the first strongholds of the Lega Lombarda. In these middle sized towns of East Lombardy this organization was able to enlarge its consensus in such a way that, by the end of the 1980s, it became by far the strongest political force, ruling local administration often with an absolute majority. On a regional level the Lega participated for the first time in 1987 in elections and was chosen by 2.7 per cent of registered voters.

Regarding the subsequent electoral success, the rise of the Lega Nord is a unique event in Italy's postwar history. Whilst openly running against the whole political establishment, within the eight years of its politically noticeable activity the Lega Lombarda has become the most powerful political force in Lombardy (Table III). In a political system with normally only a marginal change in electoral results it has attracted support

**Table III** Electoral results of the Lega Lombarda/ Nord in Lombardy 1985-90

Year	Total Votes	Perc. of valid votes
1985 (regional)	27726	0.5
1987 (national)	186218	3.2
1988 (local)	22659	6.0
1989 (European)	470997	8.1
1990 (regional)	1183904	18.9

more successfully than any other protest party or movement before. In this respect it is important to be aware that Italian movements such as the feminist and peace movement often share a common culture, activists, material resources and venues (Tarrow 1989). In contrast, the Lega has created a viable social movement where nothing similar existed. While several previous movements found some legitimacy and support in the political or religious institutions, the Lega did not. In fact, initially the Lega defined itself explicitly as the enemy of all institutions.

The first years of the different leagues' engagement was characterized by a state of semi-clandestinity. It was the period in which the Lega was publically present only on a local,

highly restricted level, furnishing a common political reference point for highly diverse cultural concerns. In fact, in spite of its being negated in the mass media, in some key areas the local leagues were able to establish an identifiable set of symbols that served as the cognitive basis for political consciousness formation. The Lega became known as a provincial actor increasingly established in local community.

In its attempt to unit different local groups fighting for ethnic or regional self-determination an observation can, however, be made. Bossi's invitation obviously did not find resonance amongst those whom one could have expected to immediately join a broader movement for regional autonomy, namely the traditional forms of regionalism and their institutions in Italy. Interestingly, neither of these, neither the political parties representing the language minorities in Val d'Aosta or South Tyrol nor the *Partito Sardo D'Azione*, reacted constructively. In spite of similar discourses with the common base 'away from Rome', these established interest groups for ethnically assigned communities were not very willing to cooperate extensively with collective actors united under the auspices of the Lega Lombarda, Liga Veneta and Lega Piemonte. In fact, this highly critical attitude vis-à-vis the Lega has never changed in substance. In investigating both cases the hypothesis which will be advanced that this silence has a *fundamentum in re*, beyond a mere rejection of the personality of Bossi or the style adopted by the Lega.

### **7.2.1. Identity Formation: The Networks of the Lega at a Local Level**

To better understand why the political message of some small core groups have been effectively communicated to target groups, why the reference to a regionally defined collective identity found some resonance, it is instructive to see how the Lega managed to establish strongholds on a local level. Corresponding to the politically constructive re-interpretation of reality the Lega has in fact effectively built up organizational networks that reproduce the new adversarial frames and socialize new activists. These networks denote local forms of interaction between individuals, organized around the political framing of the Lega. In the early years and particularly in the second half of the 1980s, firstly informal and then more formalized groups were set up, mainly in small and middle sized towns.

It was through these networks that the emerging collective identity of the Lega was affirmed and rooted in communal life. Beyond political claims in a narrower sense a subcultural milieu was built up which provided the political agent with a strong notion of

communal belonging and interests<sup>20</sup>. As Gamson confirms, this is the laboratory of "microevents that operate in linking individual and socio-cultural levels in the operation of identity, solidarity, and consciousness processes" (Gamson 1992a: 55).

Referring to these interaction processes it is intended to shed light on the mobilization on a local level and how this is integrated into the wider political project of the Lega by specific socio-psychological processes. Such a brief investigation into mobilization dynamics on a local level is essential because it is not only integral part of the Lega's political mobilization of the formative years but also a critical element in the collective identity of this regionalist force. As to be found in other social movements the Lega has in this respect been able to integrate personal and collective identity in a political project.

One crucial feature in generating the territorially based collective identity was without doubt the notion of solidarity. To apply this perspective to the case of the northern leagues may be surprising, particularly for those who think that the Lega is nothing but an anti-tax-party supported by strategically calculating inhabitants of North Italy. Beyond such an economically restricted perspective, on a local level the Lega has been successful in furnishing strong ideological ties between the individuals and the collectivity established by organizational networks linked to the movement. Different studies and the interviews conducted confirm that the affective integration into such a locally generated subculture was the main incentive in people's decision to join the Lega. The explicit reference to the local context - the neighborhood or the village as participatory environments - is highly qualified to provoke feelings of shared interests and common belonging. Being ideologically contrasted to remote and anonymous political structures in Rome, these environments transmit a message in itself that is very important for populist mobilization. As an activist in Bergamo stated when reflecting about his motivations to join the Lega:

Politics was never of any interest for me. What went on in Rome simply did not have anything to do with my own life .... With the Lega for the first time I saw that I could do something concrete, together with people I know. We (at the Lega/ O.S.) deal with issues people are really concerned about, not this *linguaggio* ('specialized talk') you normally hear on TV....

An activist in Florence said in this thematic context:

First I thought that these people from the Lega were just troublemakers ready to provoke without any clear ideas. But then I listened to what they say and when I went

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<sup>20</sup> Natale speaks in this context about the two souls of the Lega characterizing it firstly as a political protest movement and the second soul as the subcultural identity it acquires in the vacuum left behind by the declining Marxist-Catholic antagonism (Natale 1991: 120).

to a meeting with Bossi I got the feeling that this is exactly what I myself feel about politics. For the first time I had the impression there is someone out there who has the courage to state clearly what is the case. Bossi talks like we talk amongst ourselves. You have to say if something is 'wrong'.

The vague cultural feeling of being deprived of the capacity to determine one's own life thus gained a feasible political articulation. The enmity against the south and cynicism vis-à-vis Roman government are no longer just individual attitudes. These animosities become perceived as collectively held and politically legitimate values. They are mutually confirmed in personal contacts and framed as a deprivation calling for action. Important in this context is that the notion of an agency becomes feasible, using these feelings for political struggle and presenting a viable course of political change.

In attempting to present itself as a credible alternative to the problems of the Italian state, the Lega Lombarda not only had to select a convincing message, but likewise people capable of delivering it and an effective way of presenting it. The Lega succeeded in reaching youth people in northern Italian villages and small towns; among them it found a fertile terrain for activism. In this formative period communication techniques relied heavily on political symbolism and the adoption of theatrical action forms.

As emerges from a set of personal interviews that were conducted in the winter of 1991, activists tend to be young, relatively uneducated and disproportionately male. Often they work as craftsmen, or in small industrial units, rather than being part of the leftist-influenced traditional working class which is employed in larger units. In its initial period the Lega did not, as it has more recently, succeed in attracting more educated and urban activists. Particularly, young professionals of large cities were reluctant to positively respond to the offers of this new political agent on the Italian scene. This is reflected in the recruitment dynamics to be found at this stage of the Lega's mobilization. From the enquiry it emerged that initial mobilization occurred not among pre-existing groups of friends, but rather in informal networks of acquaintances which, through a strong integration, became friends in the course of activism in the Lega<sup>21</sup>. Similarly, research conducted by Bellotti and reported in the Corriere della Sera points out that:

Recruitment and propaganda methods remain alternative (to traditional politics). They are to a large degree based on informal connections. They attract new members from bowling halls, bars, parishes, video arcades, even stadiums. The activists of senator

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<sup>21</sup> In this context it is interesting to see that until the expansion of the Lega in the late 1980s it was required that any new member participated in a high degree of activism. Joining the Lega meant devoting an important part of one's time to politics and thereby becoming heavily engaged in the network of the *leghisti*.

Bossi have a pervasive presence comparable to the golden age of the PCI<sup>22</sup>.

The main fields of the related activity of these years were prevalingly organized around the agenda of traditional regionalism. This means first of all an explicit reference to local culture and dialect. The repertoire of political action put major emphasis on the attempt to give meaning to the territorially defined collective identity: city names on street signs were changed into their version in local dialect, plays were given and poems recited in dialect. Graffiti were written on the walls defending the right of the Lombard people against Rome and the nation-state. Commenting the formative years of the Lega Bossi describes how he himself was engaged in painting slogans on walls at nighttime and that in this period new members were expected to devote a notable part of their time to similar activities. At this stage the forms of political communication were geographically highly restricted and primitive and thus largely comparable to those normally used by local citizens' movements. Often hand-written manifests were distributed and the Lega's ideas were circulated by simply taking the Lega's publication Lombardia Autonomista, at this time casually produced, to the local bar and hairdresser's shop.

Through these activities the seeds for a viable subculture were sown. Beyond the political message and the traditional forms of regionalist mobilization the Lega set in motion a development which provided the socio-cultural grounds for the Lega's subsequent victories. Often its socializing and recruitment strategies took place in spaces genuinely non-political in character. For instance, the interviews indicate that the Lega proselytize in soccer clubs. Activists go to stadiums on Sundays and set up discussion tables. Thus, for many people the Lega becomes something visible, a presence to be considered. In this respect the Lega challenges traditional Italian parties by reproducing a similar logic of mobilization, i.e. one that is based on a strong feeling to a locally defined attachment to a particular subculture (Berzano 1992). For de Luna, the first years are in this respect characterized by rather spontaneous forms of politicization in a social environment highly receptive to the proposal of the Lega:

At the beginning, the forms of propaganda, the channels to proselyte new members and the way in which the Lega gathered first consensus in bars, at the barber's shop or in other public places were highly spontaneous: the people of the Lega rediscovered non-institutionalized places of sociality, genuine >free zones< beyond the grip of traditional politics. (De Luna 1994: 45)

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<sup>22</sup> See: 'Ai giovani piace la lega. Intolleranti verso il Sud', in: Corriere della Sera, 11 December 1991. Confirming this thesis that the Lega is following the mobilization pattern to be found in the old left, more recently the Lega started organizing "Feste della Lega" in the tradition of the PCI's "Feste dell'Unità".

In this respect the formative years of the Lega's activity were mainly designed to create a sense of commonality only loosely determined by strict political goals defined by the protest against the nation-state and its representatives. It was primarily an attempt to give dignity to cultural values and political beliefs alive in a local setting traditionally seen as remote from mainstream discourse and relegated to a culturally mediocre status. Activism in the Lega was perceived as appealing because in addition to giving a voice and legitimacy to subculturally well ingrained anti-southern feelings, it provided and made visible on a symbolic level a new identity: that of Lombards. What the isolated groups of Lega activists did was to turn the feeling of being marginalized from intellectual and political elites into a self-confident affirmation of their own values. Balbo and Manconi (1990: 77-80) speak here about two main tendencies which gave new meaning to the local lifeworld: first, 'auto-sufficiency', i.e., the believe in one's own potency and the trust in one's own capacity. Second, 'self-evaluation' describing the feeling by which faith is given to the values and resources of the community. In this setting the Lega was a critical force in initiating (and politically profiting from) the formation of a collective identity shaped by localist conditions. This is particularly true for the places of the Lega's initial successes: cities such as Bergamo, Como, Brescia and Varese where, due to a particular social environment, the Lega was able to mobilize consensus (Natale 1991, Diamanti 1993: 40ff.)<sup>23</sup>.

In this respect it is noteworthy that the Lega has mobilized theatrically people who mostly live in non-metropolitan cities and have never engaged in protest politics before. In its engagement it could not count on activists with experience and expertise acquired in related political movements. Recent Italian movements such as the feminist and peace movement share a common culture, activists, material resources and revenues. In contrast, the Lega has created a viable social movement where nothing similar existed before. It has mobilized social groups which have often been alienated from politics. Without the support and the legitimacy of political or religious institutions and in opposition to the traditionally strong political camps in Italy, the communist and catholic milieu, the Lega has given critical political importance to a new dimension of social conflict, namely, the clash of regional and national political claims.

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<sup>23</sup> In his interpretation Todesco gives these local networks a geographically and politically more limited role. For him, the Lega could only in some individual cases originate a well established mobilization on a local level. At least until the early 1990s Todesco describes the organizational presence of the Lega on the local level as highly deficient (see: Todesco 1992: 156ff.)

Against this background it is more appropriate to perceive the Lega Lombarda as a social movement with its roots essentially in a subcultural environment<sup>24</sup>. In its action repertoire the Lega first of all attempts to be symbolically present in civil society. Thus, as a political and social force its meaning goes beyond the mere electoral engagement. The Lega's call for a regional identity promises the protection or the reconstruction of an authentic and integrated social community. Its political project is successfully related to the widespread feeling of uneasiness towards the gradual disintegration of the traditional lifeworld. The Lega's organizational networks as well as its ideological program are convincingly responsive to the needs for common belonging.

At this point it is instructive to give a brief view on the mentality of the main protagonists of the time and to provide a momentary picture of the nucleus of the first supporters of the Lega Lombarda<sup>25</sup>. It gives evidence to the hypothesis that, although not being deprived in material terms (at least not on a national level), the genuine constituency of the Lega grew out of a milieu in which a distinct feeling of cultural marginalization is rampant. For instance, Bonomi (1991) speaks in his study of the Lega Lombarda, conducted in the late 1980s, of the '*aree tristi*' (sad areas) where the terrain that is responsive to the Lega's mobilization efforts. According to him, in these areas the dominant social strata perceive themselves as being culturally treated as inferior, excluded from scintillant life and remote from political decision-making<sup>26</sup>. This is accompanied by the strong sense of belonging to a group who has to work hard, often in dull jobs, while at the same time is betrayed for the fruits of its hardship. Given their low degree of spatial mobility and strong attachment to the local lifeworld, the productive groups in these areas are highly exposed to changes in the market and have thus developed a distinct fear of change. With the recession of the late 1980s and the growing competition from the international markets these groups were particularly exposed to changes in the productive sector. An environment shaped by growing uncertainty and imposed transformations in the traditional social structures bolstered a dissension that has been politically easily exploitable for the Lega.

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<sup>24</sup> See on the debate social movement versus party organization in the case of the Lega: Chapter 7.4.6.

<sup>25</sup> See for a more detailed account of the socio-cultural portrait of the Lega's constituency: Chapter 7.3.3.

<sup>26</sup> To use the framework of Bourdieu one could state that in the prevalent social order these strata in provincial or small town Northern Italy are deprived of the different forms of capital most importantly regarding their cultural capital (See: Bourdieu 1979).

Here a brief further consideration is informative. The sociological features of 'disorganized capitalism' (Lash & Urry 1987) characterized by the decline of distinct regionally and nationally profiled industrial sides and the growth of decentralized industry in smaller cities and rural areas have had an impact on the self-assessment of these productive groups in politics. Their growing importance in national economy became increasingly perceived as incompatible with their political and cultural peripherality. In fact, in Italy traditionally the influence of these groups in politics is highly limited. Mostly due to the close link between the strong statal industries and political parties' elites, small entrepreneurs and businessmen have a very limited role in societal and political life. One can speak here of a distinct feeling of 'relative deprivation'. A political actor with the outspoken aim of fighting against the monopoly of state power and of giving them a more significant say in their local concerns would be sure to find enthusiastic support among these groups<sup>27</sup>. In political terms these groups (particularly in Veneto) were traditionally well integrated into a strong Catholic political subculture with strong ties to the DC. These alliances crumbled with the rise of the Lega. On this point Diamanti observes:

The electorate geography of the Lega coincides with the far-reaching change that in the 1970s and 1980s has heavily impacted the North. In these zones that seemed to be economically dynamic and politically stable the socio-economic change has redefined with particular force the logic of economic development, forms of social solidarity and political allegiances, which in the past seemed consolidated and beyond debate. (Diamanti 1993:41)

Examining the lifeworld experiences of the initial supporters of the Lega a further reflection proves necessary to understand why a political force could so easily generate a consensus in this environment. Unlike other states, for instance France or Britain, the population in Italy lives predominantly in small villages and towns. The village as a social system was traditionally centered on a set of age- and gender-specific meeting places. These included the parish and food stores for adult women, the tavern for adult men, and Catholic clubs and sports activities for adolescents. In leftist areas the "Casa del Popolo" (People's House) also provided a socializing venue. In the more urban environment work in factories also came to provide an additional meeting opportunity and a source of daily experienced solidarity.

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<sup>27</sup> It is no accident that it has been managers from these small and medium sized industries who have supported the juridical investigations against *tagentopoli*. It gave them the opportunity to attack the hegemonic block formed by governing parties and the semi-statal big companies with their bribe-based system of mutual interest.

In recent decades, cultural, political and economic forces have altered the situation and produced a decline in meeting opportunities. In northern Italy from the 'seventies onwards many factories were closed down and replaced by a network of cottage industries and family-sized workshops. This process was made possible by technological innovation, and emerged as a result of successful unionization in factories, which raised labor costs, and a taxation system which draws an unfair proportion of resources from medium and large sized productive units (Moroni 1994). A new system of spread-out workplaces emerged as a successful economic innovation, but it threatened the sense of community which was typical of the traditional organization of life. It also threatened the workers' collective identity that had emerged in larger work units. Parallel to this, the process of secularization reduced the socializing role played by Catholic associations. Changing lifestyles connected to the decline of the extended family also contributed to the disruption of local communities. Furthermore, massive migrations from the south and non-European immigrants (in the 1980s) were felt as a menace in village communities traditionally characterized by cultural and social stability.

Interestingly, however, there is no direct causal link between immigration and support for the Lega. Highly supportive communities are not those with the highest immigration rate, but those that because of their isolation feel more threatened<sup>28</sup>. Communities with a high integration rate are already modern in that they are multi-cultural and socially mobile. As in the case of Milan, support for the Lega comes late and on a lower level. In its initial phase the Lega provided a solution to the crisis of the small town as a social system. It offered a unifying element at the ideological level and a socializing activity in the practice of activism as well as in the multifarious recreational activities connected with the Lega. In this way the Lega met the demands of people whose desire for political participation had previously been hindered by their subcultural standing.

#### **7.2.1.1. Symbolic and Ritual Processes in Constructing an Ethno-regional Identity: the Invention of Tradition**

At first sight it seems paradoxical to imagine that in the most prosperous and, in socio-economic terms, most modernized region of Italy an ethnically framed political project has been able to find resonance. Lombardy is one of the flourishing regions of Europe with an internationally-oriented industry and tertiary sector; it is culturally shaped by strong allegiance

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<sup>28</sup> See: Mannheim/ Biorcio (1991).

to Northern Europe, particularly to Switzerland and Germany. It has neither experienced a particular economic deprivation within the nation-state nor has its cultural identity been under any kind of open imperialistic attack.

How then has the Lega been able to give meaning to a newly forged territorial collective identity in such a highly advanced society? How has it been successful in offering an 'appealing' way of looking at social reality and providing incentives to become active for political aspirations defined by goals like regional autonomy and 'ethnic self-determination'? It is important to remember that the social grievances mentioned, to which the ideological package of the regionalist movement reacts, are not automatically translatable into political protest behavior. The fact that it channels the widespread dislike of nation-state politics into an interpreting framework which functions according to the image of an incompatibility between the interests of the region and the nation-state, is of decisive importance for the Lega (this is first of all the highly suggestive opposition between 'we' and the 'others'<sup>29</sup>). As Gamson and Modigliani formulate it, 'ideological packages' - in this case those of a radically federal order and of regional self-determination - "are usually displayed through signature elements that imply the core frame and involve the whole with handy condensing symbols."(Gamson & Modigliani 1987: 154)<sup>30</sup>.

In the Lega's discourse, the fight against an anonymous and abstract entity called the state in a general sense is often replaced by a campaign against concrete enemies: the Roman politician, *i partiti* (in its polemic meaning), the 'lazy' southerner, or the 'parasitic' immigrant<sup>31</sup>. The stigmatization of those who are by definition different and excluded from the community defined as 'Lombard' or 'northern' is thus an integral part of the attempt to 'create' a politically exploitable regional identity. This 'framing device' with its underlying notion of superiority of the community can be seen as what Bennett calls 'political accounts', "defined as explanations that excuse or justify questionable behavior by proposing a normative

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<sup>29</sup> As Gamson describes the successful formation of protest: "a process of replacing a dominant belief system that legitimizes the status quo with an alternative mobilizing belief system that supports collective action change." (Gamson/ Fireman/ Rytina, 1982:15).

<sup>30</sup> Gamson/Modigliani (1987); they furthermore state in this context: "Every policy issue is contested in a symbolic arena... Their (the movement's advocates'/O.S.) weapons are metaphors, catchphrases, and other condensing symbols that frame the issue in a particular issue."(p.143).

<sup>31</sup> This aspect, the fact that the fight for regional autonomy is directed against concrete opponents is as such no sign of racism. As Piven and Cloward state: "People experience deprivation and oppression within a concrete setting, not as the end of large and distract processes, and it is the concrete experience that molds their discontent into specific grievances." (Piven /Cloward, 1977:20).

status for the behavior" (Bennett, 1980: 793). These 'accounts' are designed to bring about a redefinition of norms and interpretative perspectives which are crucial for the structure of political conflict.

Until recently, most people who grew up in Lombardy and Veneto were not too very interested in being Lombards, or even aware of it. For instance, one might have felt Milanese, since a strong localist tradition has been present there for a long time, which in the case of Milan - but also in that of other nearby cities - is sustained by a distinctive dialect and an indigenous literature<sup>32</sup>. However, Lombardy is not a concept that has been felt by traditional localist subcultures. At most there was a distinction between unspecified "northerners" and "southerners". Lombardy as a territorial reference point for the formation of collective identity and for political aspirations was the ingenious creation of the Lega Lombarda. Through this the Lega was able to overcome the narrow boundaries of localism, and present itself as the herald of a shared heritage and the interpreter of a broader social movement. As Anderson notes, ethnic identities have the property of appearing to be timeless, even if they were minted yesterday (Anderson, 1983). The Lega Lombarda has profited from this fact<sup>33</sup>. Accordingly, the Lega is seeking to base its legitimacy in a supposedly stable 'Lombard' history and destiny and, in a second step, to use these - socially generated - feelings of territorial belonging for the formation of political protest. Daily lifeworld experiences are referred to in order to emphasize the distinct regional character. The communicative practice - according to Habermas the very core of the lifeworld identity - is one crucial field in which this communal identity is strengthened and transformed into a political movement.

In furnishing the territorially defined collective identity rituals are of primary importance. Rituals are in this context understood as the theatrical confirmation of the community establishing boundaries and agreed criteria of membership. They are key elements in what Pizzorno describes as the '*discorso identificante*', the identifying discourse by which a collective identity is shaped (Pizzorno 1983). Beyond the above described local face-to-face interaction the Lega uses channels of public communication to assign a commonly shared meaning to the 'Lombard' community. Following the patterns of nationalism the Lega first of all sought to fortify a shared belief in common ancestry, a sense of being collectively

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<sup>32</sup> Romanelli shows how this localist tradition has its roots in a traditionally strong distinct cultural and political identity of single cities in Italy. See: Romanelli (1991).

<sup>33</sup> A sizable portion of Lombard voters state that they strongly identify with their regional background. However, many more Lega voters retain their localist identity as their primary identification. Be that as it may, it is clear that there has been a rise in regional identification.

bound to a historical fate based on the 'myth of common descent' (Connor).

To celebrate and emphasize the Lombards' heritage, ample use was made of flags, medieval armors and songs. In order to give the heritage a symbolic presence little gadgets, such as Lega watches, neck-ties, hats and pins were and still are distributed amongst its supporters. Through t-shirts, and other paraphernalia the collectively shared 'lombardness' was celebrated beyond concretely formulated political goals. Activism was glorified and solidarity enhanced through the extensive use of ritual. First of all, in its public presentations the Lega sought to create a symbolic continuity between its own political goals and those of its various historical predecessors. Be it the ancient coalition of Lombard cities (called the Lega Lombarda) which, under the leadership of Milan and encouraged by the Pope, joined to defeat the troops of the Holy Roman Emperor in 1176, be it be Lombardy's fight during the *risorgimento* for nationalist and federalist goals, these historic references are deliberately made in order to justify the contemporary fight for regional rights. In his speeches of this period Bossi constantly emphasizes these historical cornerstones of the Lega's fight for regional self-determination.

Consequently, in the repertoire of the Lega there is an anthem, oath ceremonies, and the adoption of high sounding language which uses words such as destiny. Founding the legitimacy of this regionalist movement upon the inviolable continuity of history the Lega sought to give its political goals an image of being qualitatively different - with respect to its historic 'authenticity' - from contemporary political approaches. Demonstrations were organized with parts of the audience wearing traditional costumes and old rituals being performed. Everything had of course just recently been minted<sup>34</sup> out of the very symbolic codes extensively used by modern nation states and applied to Lombardy, but it was and to a lesser extent still is accepted wholeheartedly by activists. The basic idea behind this staging of historical events is - in contrast to normal political speeches - to encourage activism amongst the supporters and to enhance solidarity. The creation of an identifiable community is the actual meaning of this link-up with the 'national' history of Lombardy<sup>35</sup>, a recourse

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<sup>34</sup> See in this respect the work of Lynn Hunt on the French revolution (Hunt 1987).

<sup>35</sup> For instances, it is not by accident that the journalist and convinced supporter of the Lega Lombarda, Vimercato, referred to Lombardy in his book on this movement as the *piccola patria*, the small nationhood (Vimercato, 1990:62).

into the past which even for committed supporters of the Lega seems rather artificially created<sup>36</sup>.

It hence proved critical for the Lega to transform the reference to the past into a resource for mobilization, to a legitimizing ground on which political claims for the future can be formulated. Lombardy as a territorial unit appears here as the home of 'honesty and excellence', as a blueprint for a society radically different from the one realized in the Italian-nation state. The feeling of superiority merges into a missionary attitude well documented in Bossi's lyric delineation of the Lega's main aspirations:

The Lega appeared among the mountains and valleys of Lombardy, but, like our streams, is not destined to remain enclosed here. I have always believed that the Lega's revolution would affect all Italy like a river in spate (Bossi in Savelli 1992:IV).

Emblematic in this respect is the political show performed regularly at Pontida. It is in this small village near Milan where historically the ancient Lombard League gathered its troops before fighting Barbarossa<sup>37</sup>. Nowadays, the Lega Lombarda/Nord organize a regular manifestation there with recently over 20.000 people assembled under a giant reproduction of Alberto da Giussano, the hero of the battle fought at Legnano. The ancient warrior is belligerently raising his sword<sup>38</sup>, - this time, however, not towards the invaders coming from the Alps but south, towards Rome. Under the presence of this symbol of an invincible Lombardy there are numerous flags representing the colors mainly of Lombardy and the Veneto (a lion on reddish ground). Particularly in the formative years some activists came to the meeting dressed up as the League's soldiers from the medieval ages. Pontida is important for the Lega in two respects. Primarily it ritually affirms the junction to the suppressed and still heroic past<sup>39</sup> of their particular region and dramatizes the staging of group belonging. Furthermore Pontida provides the forum on which Bossi redefines the political guidelines and

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<sup>36</sup> Those interviewed obviously felt uncomfortable when confronted with questions concerning the 'historical roots' of the Lega.

<sup>37</sup> See for the historic story of the Lega Lombarda: Cardini (1991). In the interpretation of Bossi and his associates Barbarossa as the incarnation of the threat to Lombardy is referred to as the representative of the oppressive centralized nation-state. In the interpretation given by the Lega, in 1176 the principle of 'autonomie comunali' (local autonomy) was confirmed for the first time in Europe; then, however, this principle was systematically annulled in history (see. 'Legnano 1176, una storia attuale' Lombardia Autonomista No.2, 1989; 'La storia della Lega Lombarda', in: Lombardia Autonomista, No.8, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> The fighter from Langniano has equally become the official symbol of the Lega Lombarda/Nord.

<sup>39</sup> This is for example expressed in the slogan used in the poster: "Un popolo buono ma invincibile." ('A pleasant people but invincible').

announces changes in the Lega's fight, laying out the aims for the period to come. As becomes evident from the meaning attributed to it Pontida is the location where the 'fate of the Lombard people' should legitimately be decided. It is here that Bossi asks by acclamation for the support of the representatives of his '*popolo*' (people).

In this process of identity creation theatrical action - regardless of the actor's intentions - has a special role. It facilitates a sacralization, an emotional representation and the creation of a reality *sui generis* associated with the idea of Lombardy. In addition, theatrical and symbolic action have important structural consequences in shaping the political order and lines of conflict<sup>40</sup>. Specifically:

- 1) In the Lega socially interactive subgroups are not easily formed because of limitations of time and resources, yet face-to-face interaction significantly facilitates collective action. Symbolic actions constitute a common space for the different peer groups which would otherwise be limited in their activities. People belonging to different groups engage in communal symbolic action. This does not necessarily mean that this action happens in places which are not dissimilar to those of other political organizations (such as bars, sport facilities, or public squares); rather it is essential to see that the Lega gives new communal (political) meaning to these places.
- 2) The availability of selective incentives is limited by the social heterogeneity of activists. Shared symbols focus activism and homogenize the values of groups. They are media for selective recruitment, indoctrination, identity formation and motivation maintenance, which are important elements in the chances of success for the movement. In this respect the Lega has been successful in providing a collective identity integrated by commonly held values and a strong sense of belonging.
- 3) Symbolic actions are unstructured activities which are compatible with somewhat differing definitions of the situation. In fact, the strength of symbols is their unspecific nature. They



Figure 5 Poster from the first issue of *Lombardia Autonomista* (1982)

<sup>40</sup> See for a theoretical discussion of political myths: Dörmer (1993)

leave enough ambiguity to cushion dissent so that they can soften or pre-empt conflict. As for other nationalist or regionalist movements it is critical for the Lega to claim to equally represent the interests of all social strata. Its central political claim is based on this notion that it disdains supposedly old cleavages within the assigned community (most prominently, of course, class cleavages). In this respect the Lega follows the pattern of nationalist ideology whose attractions to a large extent lie in symbolically evoking the vague, but effectual notion of a community transcending socio-structural conflicts.

4) Symbolism permits highly visible action even with a very limited number of actors. Attempts at manipulating the media engender a tense symbiosis between the media and the Lega. What the Lega sanctifies the media covers with sarcasm. However, the ability to attract media attention is often quickly exhausted and it is mainly expressive of concerns which are designed to motivate symbolic action.

5) Theatrical protest emphasizes individual contributions over mere testimonials of organizational loyalty. It provides individuals with a more finely grained repertoire through which they can express but also form identities. More conventional forms of collective action such as marches assert organizational power through the members' physical presence. The focus is on the organization's official line rather than on members utilizing the organization as a vehicle for their political statements. This difference in collective action is important because it relates to the structure of the production and distribution of legitimacy and authority within a movement.

These symbolically mediated strategies obviously have their own logic. Referring to their socio-psychological effects one can partly explain why apparently 'irrational' actions are important to the Lega's success even when they do not reach a large public or raise funds. They show how socio-psychological changes, such as the creation of a sense of community, have a known instrumental value to the movement. In this lies the connection between normative and structural interpretations of action repertoires. In addition, these considerations show that symbolic innovation is not necessarily characteristic of contemporary movements. Symbolic production can effectively re-utilize in new contexts old symbolic codes, such as the traditional symbolism of nation states. In the case of the Lega Lombarda this has meant first of all making symbolically pervasive the image of a regional community identifiable as 'Lombard'.

Looking closely at processes of political mobilization, the reference to the regionally defined territory has a threefold meaning in this context:

1. The region as a territorial entity is the source of historical and cultural identity on which the different leagues base the legitimacy of their political claims. Thus the different locally active leagues have found a common denominator which supersedes their initial isolation in a twofold manner. Firstly, by strengthening the reference to the region and later to the northern 'macro-region', they facilitated the coordination and later the institutionalized association of their respective fights. Secondly, on an ideological level, the leagues effectively contested the accusation of sanctioning questionable particularistic claims. Regionalism and decentralization qualify as justifiable universalistic goals beyond at least a narrow 'egotistic' standpoint. Hence, by relating its discourse to these ideas the Lega claimed access to the socially accepted political debates.
2. Closely related to the last point is that the territory is the reference point on the basis of which socio-economic interests are redefined and conflictualized. The territory and the related call for regional self-determination provide those legitimating resources by which fiscal and economic advantages for the community are requested in the context of the nation-state. It furnishes the criteria for the processes of defining the criteria for membership, its 'inalienable rights' and the rationale for discriminatory practices against those excluded from the community.
3. Regarding the socio-psychological consequences the notion of territory produces a strong sense of togetherness for processes of inclusion and exclusion. The territory, as the tradition of nationalism indicates, is still the strongest feature in effectively defining who is legitimately taking part in a community. Through a whole range of symbolic representation the assigned community can be given meaning (communal features based primarily on a shared language and culture). Most effective in this respect, however, is the articulate distinction from others. This critical process of boundary construction, which makes the reference to the territory meaningful in the first place, will be looked at more closely later on.

### 7.2.1.2. The Political Discourse of the Lega in Framing a New Collective Identity: 'Ethnic' Self-determination and Autonomy from Rome

Analogous to the attempt to reinvent a regional, or in the framing of the Lega, a "national" collective identity the political discourse of these formative years aimed at giving meaning to this territorially defined social entity with distinct political rights. One way of assigning significance to this communal awareness was the above-described process of identity construction by referring to a shared history and cultural heritage. Closely related to this is a discourse portraying the 'Lombard' community as dominated, exploited and during its entire history politically deprived of its authentic right for self-determination. It is only at this point that the shared collective identity becomes the source of political conflict. Only when the belonging to a territorially defined community is perceived as an unbearable state of deprivation, can it give sufficient incentives for political engagement. On this basis the collective identity actualizes its intrinsic action-oriented dimension. As Turner & Killian accurately observe: "The common element in the norm of most, and probably all, movements is the conviction that existing conditions are unjust." (Turner & Killian 1987: 242)

In generating this politically critical feeling of belonging to a community whose members are deprived of their most fundamental rights, the Lega presents itself as the political agent of the suppressed aspirations of the Lombard people. Until recently the manifestations of Bossi normally had their climax with the audience chanting *libertà, libertà* (liberty). In 1985 this was programmatically framed as follows:

Today we are asking the Lombards to join our fight for a supreme value such as liberty, without which we cannot be of the right or of the left but only bound to the arbitrary will of the Roman colonizer."<sup>41</sup>

In the Lega's campaigns this crucial notion of liberty is predominantly formulated in a negative way, as freedom from coercion. The claim for self-determination of the Lombard people is phrased as the absence of dominance supposedly exercised for decades by the centralized nation-state. In this context, the history of Lombardy is presented as a record of sufferance, as a continuity of oppression originating in the course of the *risorgimento* and equally exercised during fascism and the First Republic up until today. This symbolic reference to an 'inherited past' and a supposedly stable 'ethnic' identity finds its political

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<sup>41</sup> Lombardia Autonomista, no.29, April 1985. In general in the 1980s the relationship of Lombardy to the Italian nation-state has been described in terms of colonialism, be it framed as a preponderance of the Roman government, be it as a '*colonialismo meridionale*' (Colonial dominance of the south); see: Lombardia Autonomista, No.6, 1987.

expression in the declarations of the Lega Lombarda. For instance, the first issue of *Lombardia Autonomista* (No.1) in March 1982 opened as follows:

Lombards! It is not important what age you are, what kind of work you do or what political preferences you have: all that counts is that you are - we are - all Lombardians. This is the only fact that is important and now the moment has come to give it political concreteness.<sup>42</sup>

Like most traditional regionalist movements the link between self-determination and ethnic elements is outspoken: "The liberty of man cannot be separated from the ethnically determined liberty of a people."<sup>43</sup> Bossi, in his programmatic articles of the early 1980s described ethnicity as the new central source of social conflict and the superior way of realizing freedom (compared to class-based approaches)<sup>44</sup>. Federalism is presented as the new 'revolutionary' principle forming the decisive political cleavages for contemporary society.

One of the widely used first posters<sup>45</sup> of the Lega, published in 1988, unites the main elements of the Lega's political fight during the initial years. It shows a man, presumably from Lombardy, who is gagged and silenced. Underneath is written: "Lombard, shut up!" This phrase underlines the pictured image according to which people from this region are forbidden or constrained not to speak and hence not to decide their own concerns. The message is straightforward: Lombardy, represented by this suppressed man, is portrayed as an overpowered entity without the right and capacity to speak for itself and determine its own

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<sup>42</sup> See also in this first issue the article of Bossi: 'Autonomy of the peoples. The most advanced social model. New determinism.' Until recently this strong notion of a distinct community was combined politically with a struggle for self-determination operating with the rhetoric of autonomy. For instance, Francesco Speroni, former Head of Lega at the Senate, programmatically declared: "The Lombard nation has reopened the fight against the enemy, against anyone who seeks to impose his will upon us Lombardians from outside. In fact, the methods have changed: no longer the barricade, but an active and democratic militancy in order to constrain the representatives of the Lombardian people to oppose the oppression by the Roman parties by the means of a free and conscious vote." *Lombardia Autonomista*, No.7., 15.7.1989.

<sup>43</sup> *Lombardia Autonomista*, 28.Oct. 1989 (Luigi Moretti).

<sup>44</sup> In the Lega's early programme 'statuto della Lega Autonomista Lombarda' from September 1983 it clearly states: "The Lega Autonomista Lombarda is the political movement dedicated to realize the aspirations of liberty coming from within the Lombardian people regardless of the existing diverse class reality." (Art.5)

<sup>45</sup> Being directly designed for purposes of political mobilization these posters are a highly significant indicator in analyzing the political discourse of a political movement. They synthesize the central political claims into some key messages around which more differentiated arguments are built.

fate. Interestingly, in this poster the Lombard dialect is used<sup>46</sup>. Both main elements dominant in this formative period are hence present: the reference to an ethnically framed past via the use of dialect and the politicization of this communal belonging, thematising the suppressed role of Lombardy in the context of the Italian nation-state. Nevertheless, in this poster the ambiguous and unspecific character of the Lega's initial mobilization is manifest. The message is restricted to a general notion of suppression without specifying a political adversary or framing a perspective for political action and change. Since there was no tradition of regionalism in Lombardy this manifestation necessarily left a high degree of uncertainty about its actual political purpose (Todesco 1992: 217ff.)<sup>47</sup>.



Figure 6 Poster of the Lega (1988) produced by Bossi

The political discourse of the Lega is correspondingly organized around this image of a 'nation without a state'. In the early years articles in the *Lombardia Autonomista* are often occupied with a thorough re-interpretation of Italian history. From the *risorgimento* of the nineteenth century, to the fascist period under Mussolini and the configuration of today's nation-state Bossi and his associates claim that there is a persistent trend in history relegating Lombardy to a state of subordination to Rome. Ideologically the Roman nation-state is *per se* identified with a certain form of unjustifiable bondage, whereas decentralization and independence are portrayed as the liberating forces in history<sup>48</sup>. Accordingly, the claims for independence from Roman supremacy are expressed by effectual symbolic actions. For instance, the Lega has printed its own currency (basic unit: one *lega*), claiming the sovereign rights regularly assigned to a nation-state. Similarly, the Lega propagated if not its own

<sup>46</sup> It is noteworthy that this use of dialect was abandoned shortly after and that than the same poster was used with the slogan in standard Italian: *Liberarci Subito!* (Free us immediately)

<sup>47</sup> Without knowing the Lega and its political aspirations the poster could have been easily interpreted as a command to Lombards to keep their mouth shut.

<sup>48</sup> This is reflected in the slogan often to be found at Pontida: "*Cento popoli, cento nazioni, cento libertà*" (A hundred peoples, nations, liberties).

military force then at least an independent army provided for and led by the indigenous population.

More important than these exceedingly vague political goals, all clustered around the general idea of local or regional self-determination, were, however, the activities designed to celebrate the virtues of the Northern civil society formulated in terms of an irreconcilable opposition to professional politicians and the Roman government. For instance, slogans such as "*ladri di Roma - E' Finita*" and "*Roma Ladrona - la Lega non Perdona*"<sup>49</sup> were splattered on the walls and chanted by Lega activists. The primary task of these years was to generate a strong sense of togetherness of people united by their antagonism to the political establishment of the country. It is not by accident that in the early days the subtitle of the Lega's publication Lombardia Autonomista was the subsequently erased "*La vos del popol lombard*"<sup>50</sup>. The territorially defined identity was the fulcrum assigning dignity to the harsh critique of the political establishment and providing a feasible perspective for political change.

### 7.2.2. The Limits of Ethno-regionalism: Towards a Political Re-orientation

In order to sustain political mobilization it is essential for a social movement to find resonance with its belief system amongst its assigned constituency. It has to render its world view consistent with broadly held attitudes and orientation. It is not very likely that people will change their scheme of interpreting social events and start to act politically according to the goals of the movement, if the discrepancy between the individual belief system and the movement's ideology is too wide.

In this context it is instructive to recall some reflections from the theoretical section. One has to be aware of the fact that the individual's opinion and her/his willingness to engage in collective action arise from the public communication which "organizes both cognitive and behavioral response to public issues" (Price & Roberts 1987:787). Public discourse on a particular frame is part of a broader social process in which the receptiveness of the potential supporters is partly beyond what the movement itself is able to substantially influence. For instance, the Lega Lombarda's success is without doubt partly due to the new awareness of

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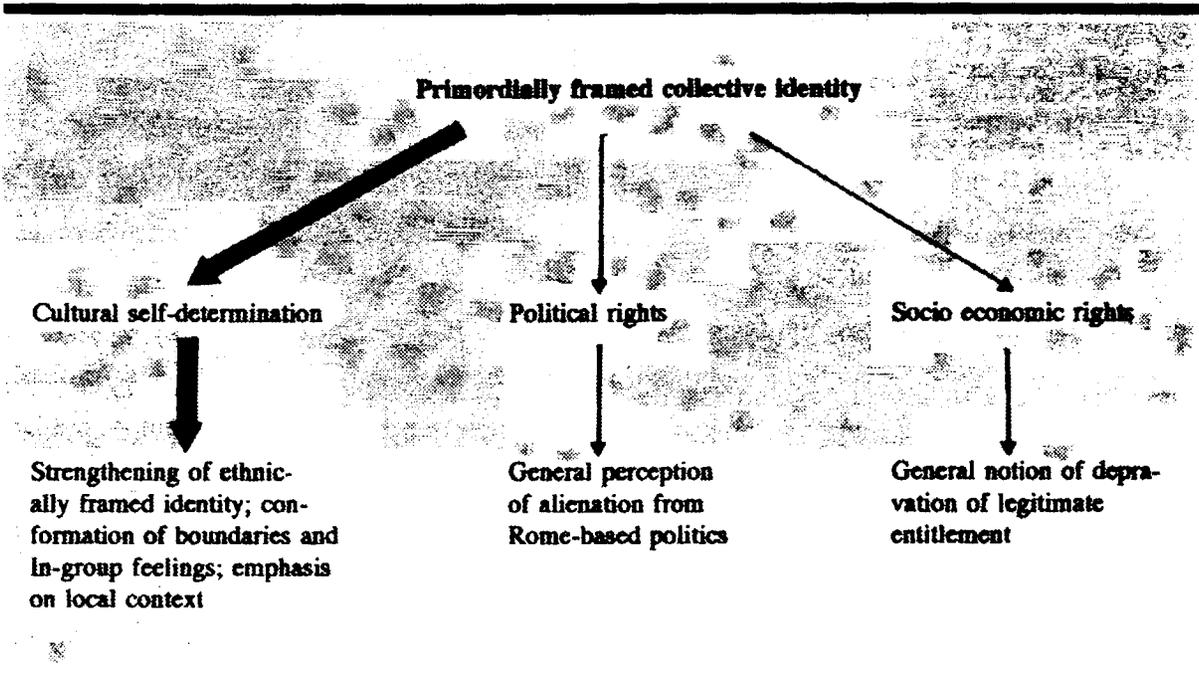
<sup>49</sup> The translation: "Roman Thief - Its over" and "Rome Thief - The Lega does not forgive".

<sup>50</sup> In Lombard dialect this means: 'The voice of the Lombard people'.

regional and minority rights in Europe and due to the increased public interest in this issue essential for the Lega's political program. However, this resonance cannot be perceived as an autonomous product of the Lega's media activity. It is instead appropriate to speak of a mutual process in which neither the development of public opinion nor the engagement of the Lega in media discourse can be seen as the sole explanation for the success of this new political actor. Public discourse is a form of societal communication that is beyond the direct control of collective agents. By formulating a social conflict and by giving rise to the accompanying processes of opinion and mobilization formation, public discourse is the crucial mediator between the movement's claims and the politically relevant development of public opinion.

Continuously, new political agents are threatened by an estrangement from those their discourse is meant to reach and mobilize. Different rhetoric strategies on the part of the collective actor have to be employed to avoid estrangement from the group of potential adherents. The political situation of the leagues at the end of the 1980s was one in which the ethnically framed collective identity threatened to put severe restrictions on their political mobilization. The gradual decline of the Liga Veneta indicated that a political agenda organized around the question of ethnic identity and the defense of local cultural habits was of no major attraction for the stipulated electorate.

As shown in the figure below, the Lega's political discourse of this first period is clearly dominated by the imperatives of an ethno-regionalist approach. Given that the territorially conceived collective identity was essentially a new one, main emphasis was put on assigning meaning to the boundaries of the collective agent. On a local level through face-to-face interaction and, more importantly, through a broader symbolic practice, the idea of a primordial community of 'Lombards' was spread. In contrast to the dominant cultural processes of self-presentation, in this phase of the Lega's mobilization, the political aspirations of the dynamic generated in the socio-cultural field remained vague. Although outside 'enemies' such as the Italian nation-state or Roman parties were named, the image of political and socio-economic depravation were not remarkably articulate. The political opposition against the Italian nation-state was rather designed to strengthen the perception of the 'We' than constituting an explicate political agenda (besides the vague call for ethnic or territorial self-determination). The self-referential discourse on the nature of the pre-political, at this stage ethnically phrased collective identity constituted the focal point in the Lega's interventions in public discourse.



Design of Lega's political discourse in first phase

However, in the long run these ethnic implications proved to be counterproductive. There was simply no broad cultural resonance, no established Lombardian culture upon which such an identity could have been built. By referring to ethnic features of a collective identity the Lega risked excluding the broad social groups which were needed for mass mobilization. Hence, the invention of emotional and political ties binding people to a territory had to be created without presupposing a strong rootedness in a native Lombardian culture. The Lega's political leader Umberto Bossi is quite aware of the restrictions that an ethnically based movement has to face. Reflecting on this initial phase of the Lega's mobilization he said that a political project of "autonomy on an ethnic basis is no longer reasonable"<sup>51</sup>.

One main element in this context is the fact that the emphasis on the particular dialect and local particularities strained the attempt to unite the different local mobilization efforts. A common denominator for the northern leagues had to be strengthened, superseding the local setting decisive for the mobilization history of this new political actor in Italian politics. This question became particularly important at a point at which changes in the Italian political system opened up new opportunities for the Lega. In the late eighties the DC had problems in firmly reproducing its hegemonic position in the northern *zone bianche*. In order to benefit from the political vacuum which resulted from the loosening of the traditional political

<sup>51</sup> Bossi in an interview in *La Repubblica*, 14.2.93.

loyalties, the Lega had to present itself as a force beyond the narrow boundaries set by ethno-regionalism.

In the light of the restrictions set by the nature of the initial collective identity and hence endemic to the first phase of Lega's mobilization, a substantial reorganization of its integrating collective identity and its mode of framing reality, perceived as the structuring principle of the political discourse, became necessary. The overarching meaningful frame of reference and orientation for action proved to be inappropriate to induce further political conquests. Applying concepts developed by Snow and his associates one can speak of two main rhetoric strategies in the attempt to bring into firmer alignment the Lega's belief system and the dominant ideas of its potential constituency. One can speak of a 'frame amplification' (Snow et al. 1986) by which those values have been adopted that are widespread or dominant in the given society. In doing this, the Lega 'extended' and subsequently 'transformed' its interpretative frames in order to find a broader resonance in the population. The nature of the Lega's locally restricted and ethnically framed protest made such a re-orientation necessary. It was in this process of adopting a new integrating collective identity that amongst the different regionally organized leagues the Lega Lombarda became the main protagonist challenging Italy's political establishment.

The initially primordially conceived ethnic identity was far too restrictive to allow for, such an extension of the political mobilization. Originally effective in furnishing a sense of commonality and a perception of a coherent collective actor as a forceful advocate of local or regional concern, the ethnically framed collective identity increasingly posed critical restrictions to the targeted widening of the protest. In the second phase of its mobilization the integrative collective identity is essentially reformulated so that these constraints could be overcome.

### 7.3. First Successes: The Emergence of the Secessionist Lega Lombarda (1988-90)

The late 1980s saw a distinct new period of the Lega's political mobilization. Regarding both its collective identity and its institutional stand, the Lega underwent a phase of significant transformation, abandoning the localist context of its initial mobilization. This transformation is accompanied by a substantial increase in its electoral support.

Although the Lega in 1987 had already had a notable electoral success in five provinces of Lombardy (2.5% for the Senate and 3% for the Parliament), the decisive step on the political scene happened in 1988. It was in this year that the Lega Lombarda won 44 communal *consiglieri* (councilors) seats with the help of which this organization went beyond the localist context of political mobilization. This electoral trend was confirmed in 1989's European elections in which the Lega attained 8.1% of the valid votes in Lombardy.

These features of electoral success accelerated a development towards a spread of the Lega throughout the entire country. On an institutional level a decisive step in this was the formation of the *Alleanza Nord*<sup>52</sup> in the context of the European elections, an organization which later became the Lega Nord. Here, it is, however, noteworthy that due to its internal distribution of power this organizational affiliation was not built on the principle of

**Table IV** Electoral results of the Alleanza Nord in 1989's European elections compared with results from 1984's general elections

	% 1989	% 1984	Diff.% 89-84
Lombardia	8.1	0.3	+7.8
Piemonte	2.1	0.3	+1.8
Veneto	1.7	3.4	-1.7
Liguria	1.4	0.2	+1.2
Friuli Venezia	0.5	0.7	-0.2
Val d'Aosta	0.5	3.2	-2.7
Emilia Romagna	0.5	0.1	+0.4
Trentino-Alto A.	0.3	1.0	-0.7
Total North	3.6	0.8	+2.8

equal partnership. Already the figures of the electoral results indicated how Bossi's Lega Lombarda could acquire a dominant role in this nucleus of the Lega Nord. As Table IV shows it was in Lombardy that the share of the Alleanza's votes expanded most extremely. Here the Lega Lombarda was able to substantially increase its electoral share whereas the other leagues could extend their support only on a much lower level. In some cases, the Lega Veneta being

<sup>52</sup> The *Alleanza Nord* was compassed of the Lega Lombarda, Lega Veneta, Lega Emilia Romagna, Union Ligure, Alleanza Toscana and Piemont Autonomista.

the most prominent, the Alleanza Nord even lost parts of its previous constituency.

### 7.3.1. Redefining the Collective Identity: Towards Socio-economic Regionalism

From the beginning the Lega's political identity was composed of two 'souls'. On the one hand, the above-described form of 'ethno-regionalism' with its distinct reference to an ethnically and culturally homogenous community and, on the other hand, a form of populist protest against the nation-state and its representatives. Although still working with features of territorial identity as the legitimating ground of its political engagement, for the latter form the claim of being rooted in and the advocate of an ethnically assigned people no longer had a determining impact on the political agenda. With the rise of the Lega Lombarda and the growing organizational coordination between the different leagues the integrating collective identity underwent a substantial redefinition. Although an ethnic identity, based on the notion of a cultural and even biological uniqueness of the regional community, survived for quite a long time particularly in Veneto and Piemonte<sup>53</sup>, its significance in political campaigns of the Lega was in steady decline.

As emerges from the personal interviews conducted, the activists of the Lega Lombarda share a faith in a distinctive ideological package<sup>54</sup> as an integrative reference point for their political identity. In apparent contrast to ethnic features this is centered on a Lombard identity based on the value of honest hard work as a moral duty and as a prized personal inclination. It extends to a reiterated appreciation for "facts rather than words" and from this derives a distrust of career politicians, their convoluted language and corrupted morals. The single elements of this ideological package have been present in Italian public discourse for some time, and have been clearly reflected by the media. However, its fulcrum - the Lombard identity - is a new one.

The success of the Lega is largely based on cleverly conflictualizing this identity, giving it a political meaning it formerly did not exhibit. The shared work ethics was growingly portrayed as incompatible with the logic prevailing in the Italian nation-state and more particularly in the Roman political center of the country. Referring to the fact that

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<sup>53</sup> In the publication *Piemonte Autonomista* these references to a "biological reality" (January 1988, No.1) and the "natural rights of the ethnic community" (ibid.) are of distinctively more importance than in the Lega's journal in Lombardy.

<sup>54</sup> For the concept of ideological package see: Gamson (1988). On the role of ideology in social movements see: Ruzza (1990).

Italy's wealth is and, more particularly, the resources for the state apparatus are predominantly produced in the productive north, very concrete economic interests were formulated. The hard working producers in Lombardy were presented as deprived of their legitimate social entitlements<sup>55</sup>. The Lega claimed to represent the '*popolo dei produttori*' (people of the producers), polemically contrasting it with the wastefulness of the southern dominated state. Thus the integrating collective identity was equipped with a political agenda highly sensitive to the Lega's designated adherents and as such extraordinarily effective in mobilizing political support. Delineating the social groups at the core of the Lega's mobilizing effort, F. Castellazzi, a leading figure in the Lega of the 1980s, declared:

We are in favor of the liberalism of the small and middle entrepreneurs.... It is this milieu, represented by the mode of production of these small and medium size businessmen, where we find the fundamental values, the traditions and the concern for the environment that belong to us. (In: *Il Giornale* 1.3.1991)

In a study analyzing the electoral development of the Lega until the 1990 elections, Natale (1991) shows that for the Lega's vote in the late 1980s and early 1990s the socio-economic variables were determinant: next to the age (41%) indicators such as the presence of agrarian activity (48%) and of small business men and independent workers (40%) were decisive variables in explaining the Lega's success. In contrast, socio-cultural variables like long-term residence in the province (19%) or the immigration rate (12%) are of decisively less significance. It is against this background that Manconi speaks of a "*movimento egoistico*", an egoists' movement (Manconi 1990) which basically advocates the clearly defined material interests of the productive strata in Lombardy and Piemonte.

Correspondingly, the Lega changed the substance of its political campaigns in this phase of transition towards a socio-economically justified 'regionalism'. Thus, a book published in the early 1990s with the title "What does the Lega want" (Savelli 1992), written by a convinced *leghista* and introduced by Bossi himself, has as its almost exclusive theme the fiscal and economic injustice which the northern regions are said to suffer. The book reflects the dominant reasoning of the Lega's campaign of this time: it contrasts a burdensome and unfair tax system, discriminating against the productive northern regions and privately against the upright citizen (problem of tax evasion) with the spending practices of the Roman nomenclature. According to this picture the entire tax system becomes absurd through the

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<sup>55</sup> It is against the background of this emphasis on socio-economic rights that commentators speak, in contrast to Inglehart's concept, of a 'neo-materialist value orientation to be found in the Lega's mobilization (See: Feltrin/ Morisi 1992).

'*falsi consumi collettivi*' (false collective consumptions), and is said to be basically used to fill the pockets of corrupt politicians.<sup>56</sup>

Linked to the rise of a collective identity based on the dominant frame 'socio-economic injustice' is the emergence of a more aggressive demarcation from outside. It is first of all by using the prevailing anti-southern feelings and by framing the *mezzogiorno* as the genuine threat to the community, that a shared work ethic could have become the basis for political claims. It is under the auspices of the Bossi's unifying aspiration that the 'Other', the enemy, became a prominent feature in the Lega's mobilizing efforts. The emphasis was initially on the internal dividing line of Italian society. The 'Non-We' as the subject of exclusion from the Lombard community in the early years was mainly defined by those social groups supposedly non compatible with the values of the Lombard people: *i meridionali* (people from southern Italy) and marginal groups such as homosexuals, drug addicts or homeless people. Going beyond the local context meant to strengthening the collective identity of a political agent no longer integrated by personal relationships but by an overarching, symbolically generated belief system. The creation of a broader 'Other' proved to be capable of uniting the different northern regions with their respective political-cultural tradition into one single political project.

Evaluating the Lega's growing emphasis on socio-economic matters Ricolfi arrives at, on the basis of his analysis of the supporters' attitudes and values, the interpretation that the Lega has to be seen as "nothing else but a form of extreme liberalism, a delayed return to a *laissez-faire* ideology" (Ricolfi, 1993). This extreme market-oriented liberal postulate is characterized as the basic point of ideological reference for diverse subjects of the Lega's programmatic stand. Although pointing correctly to one of the Lega's crucial positions - for instance, the contrast of private and public is often referred to in order to demarcate the difference between virtuous and honest on the one hand and corrupt on the other (state/public versus civil society/ private<sup>57</sup>) - this interpretation does not hold when it comes to explaining the mass support of the Lega. The argument is that to portray the Lega basically as a

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<sup>56</sup> See for a discussion why the issue of taxes perfectly qualifies to bring together the different elements in the Lega's political identity chapter 7.5.1.1.

<sup>57</sup> It is obvious that the Lega seeks to establish a strong link between the concept of autonomy and concrete economic and social interests. For example, some titles of Lombardia Autonomista are as follows: 'Only with autonomy will our farmers have fewer taxes and more pension.' (30. Jan.1987); 'Rome: weight upon Lombardia. The economic potential of Lombardy can only be realized under the condition of autonomy' (No.27, 31 Nov. 1988).

movement of small producers with clear formulated socio-economic interest would be too restricted to explain the rise of the Lega. As further study will show this feature is only part of a broader mobilization process forceful enough to launch a mass movement. In studying territorial politics economic motivations of elites have been overemphasized compared to the ideological and organizational components in regionalist mobilization. A more comprehensive picture of the Lega's political discourse is needed to shed light on the ideological attraction of this new actor in Italian politics.

### 7.3.1.1. Features of Populist Mobilization: The Language of the Lega

Some significant changes in the Lega's ritual presentation have occurred. For instance, in its early years the Lega utilized the local dialect extensively. Properly re-defined as "the language of the Lombard Nation", the dialect had the characteristic of being a clear boundary-spanning device. At night activists re-wrote street signs in dialect, sometimes creating problems for non-natives. It was also a fast and effective way of gaining exposure without having to be committed to specific political programs. Since the Lombard dialects generally drop the last vowel from standard Italian, it was sufficient to efface with spray paint a single letter from street signs to make a political statement.

However, over reliance on dialect proved counter-productive. Many educated young people do not speak it, and dialects vary significantly in small areas<sup>58</sup>. There was a risk of creating barriers within the movement instead of enhancing solidarity. In addition, using the dialect had an alienating effect on those potential members who had at least one southern parent, but were born in the north. This problem acquired even wider dimensions after the Lega decided to propose an alliance with other northern *leghe*, and create a larger political unit called Lega Nord. Furthermore, the emphasis on dialect appeared too parochial and lent itself to ridicule. For instance, in city hall meetings a working class communist mayor could tease a young Lega city councillor about an imperfect understanding of the dialect. Thus more

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<sup>58</sup> In 1991 Mannheimer and associates conducted a study which shows that usage of dialect in everyday conversation is not more widespread amongst the Lega's constituency than amongst the supporters of other parties. For instance, 68.9% of the DC and 50.0% of the PSI supporters declared to use dialect 'often' whereas only 56.1% of the Lega followers indicated a frequent exercise of dialect (See: Mannheimer 1993: 100).

recently the reliance on the dialect appears to have been significantly reduced<sup>59</sup>.

A new linguistic invention - a language code taken directly from the street and imported into the political arena has increasingly replaced the dialect. The public speeches of the Lega rely heavily on metaphors, catchphrases, commonplaces taken from everyday language and re-interpreted in political terms. For instance, a Lega's billboard poster states: "The Lega cleans the engine (of politics/ O.S.)". It is a simple message, taken directly from advertizing and expressed in ordinary language. The Lega is using a language and concepts familiar to its audience. In this, it does not refrain from drastic verbal and symbolic attacks particularly on the political establishment of the country. In its formative period, Roman politicians were constantly insulted as 'liars', 'thief' or 'idiots' and openly threatened with the (violent) revenge of the 'people'. Even more recently, in the context of *tangentopoli*, Lega MPs brought a gibbet to a session of the Parliament to indicate what the Lega considers to be the most appropriate solution for the 'political class'<sup>60</sup>. Likewise, in 1993 Bossi threatened to organize a 'march on Rome' unless the government resigned. Instead of taking these aggressions literally, they should to be understood as provocations performed in effective theatrical actions.

To appreciate the extent of this innovation one has to consider that over the years Italian politicians have developed an extremely convoluted and baroque political jargon. It sounds obscure to most Italians. It assumes an insider's knowledge of political affairs, and the ability to 'read between the lines'. Presenting themselves as an anti-system movement, the Lega has chosen a language that - as an activist says - seek to bring politics "down to the level of common people". It appears as a de-sacralization of politics.

This becomes evident if we consider that one of the most common slogans is a simple affirmation of masculine sexual prowess, in crude language. It is a sentence used as a disingenuous reaction to complicated questions or comments by political opponents. It does

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<sup>59</sup> The wider point touched upon here is evidently the problem of credibility of an ethnically defined Lombard identity. Not accidentally, this collective identity is almost exclusively formulated negatively in demarcation from the south. Its spurious character became obvious whenever the interviewees were asked what a 'Lombard identity' actually means and what its main elements are. The most common reaction was simply a telling silence.

<sup>60</sup> Reflecting on the political prospects of the Lega, Bossi belligerently stated in 1992: "1995 is going to be the year of the samurai. That will be the year the Lega 'slits' the throat of the Dc from one ear to the other." (Bossi in Vimercati 1992: 20)

not make sense, but it creates disconcerted embarrassment<sup>61</sup> and anger in political circles. It provokes hilarity and elation among activists, and conveys the anti-system component of the Lega. Vulgarity is raised to the status of a virtue because it possesses a simplicity and directness that is felt to be lacking elsewhere. Not surprisingly, with so much "machismo" the number of females among activists is (at least initially) very low. However, to a large part of the Italian public this emphasis on simplicity appears refreshing, and is easily understood. It seems to convey the views and the anger of working people. It seems more difficult to lie, cheat and embezzle in such simple language than in the Byzantine speeches of professional politicians. A similar device was adopted by new social movements in the early 'eighties. To the complicated and unconvincing speeches of political opponents, groups of activists would react chanting scemo, scemo (stupid, stupid) in a tone children use to tease each other.

The choice of a vulgar speech code goes is linked with the utilization of simple, and at times clearly incorrect, syntactic structures which appear to be a literal translation from the dialect. It is meant as a statement about the personal background of Lega voters, an electorate of wealthy artisans, small businessman and shopkeepers. Thus, it has almost the same identity-forming result as using dialect, without the shortcomings previously discussed. In addition it has allowed for the simplification of complicated problems, and offers an opportunity for activists with little education to be active.

The mobilizing effects of this use of a direct and simple language cannot be underestimated. It productively counteracts an alienation from politics which is most significant in those regions that are - geographically as well as culturally - far from the center of political power. It is the strength of a populist approach to politics to give its audience at least the impression of breaking down the barriers between official politics and daily life. For instance, this is reflected in remarks made by Lega supporters interviewed: "When Bossi is speaking it is as if I am speaking"; "Bossi flings into the politicians' teeth what we tell each other." (Biorcio, 1990:70) As a leading figure of the Liga Veneta explains his main motivations to join the Lega:

One day, it was during the early 1980s, I saw a graffiti of the Lega. I was struck by the things that were said and the way in which they were expressed. I would not say that I decided (to join/ O.S.) in this moment. But the way of speaking so different from the official politicians gave me the decisive push. (cited in: Diamanti 1992:235)

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<sup>61</sup> The actual slogan - unfortunately untranslatable - is "La lega ce l'ha duro." (Something like: "The Lega is full of spunk")

Next to the language the outer experience of the Lega politicians, most prominently Bossi himself, decisively contribute to its populist appeal. In sharp discrepancy to the eloquent and stylishly dressed normal Italian politician, Bossi is negligent about his clothes. He usually wears unfashionable suits with ties that seldom match and that are mostly untied. His hair is not neatly stylish nor does he move typical of professional politicians. On the contrary, everything is meant to symbolically express: I am a hard working citizen who does not have anything in common with the parasitic class of those belonging to the political elite. The identification with the politicians of the Lega as 'one of us' is decisively facilitated by this<sup>62</sup>. More than the ideas and political goals in a narrower sense, this populist demonstration of the belonging to the 'normal people' has been decisive in mobilizing support for the Lega.

In this context a theoretical consideration would seem to be helpful. Focusing on the populist character of the Lega's mobilization one can approach the question of why the collective action framing of the Lega was so successful. Why did the Lega's agenda of a center-periphery conflict bring salient conflicts in Italian society to public attention and cause them to be treated as highly conflictual political issue? The public discourse in which political meaning is assigned to certain issues is more than the media-based flow of news, pictures and comments. Given the fragmented nature of information communicated by the mass media television, radio and newspaper are not sufficient to provide strong incentives to engage in politics. Conflictual issues need to be effectively framed and equipped with a credible project of political change in order to become the subject of an organized collective and an incentive for individual action. General frames from media discourse have to be convincingly translated into communicative processes that structure the attention and concern in concrete social networks. Broad issues from mass media need to enter the interpretative order by which people frame social reality in daily life. To become a convincing incentive for political engagement individuals must make sense of political issues and relate them to their 'private' concerns. They need to find resonance in popular perception close to people's life. In this respect, general feelings of deprivation which may result from noticing certain news have to be linked to more elaborated ideologies designed to give these feelings a mobilizing political meaning. In other words, it is decisive to see through which processes it becomes possible "to connect the abstract cognition of unfairness with the emotion of moral indignation." (Gamson 1992b: 176)

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<sup>62</sup> For Wiles (1969) clothes and the entire style of living are a key element in and a main characteristic of political actors' behavior which pursue a populist approach in politics. It is hence not surprising that in his bibliography as well as in his appearances in public Bossi constantly underlines that he is an 'ordinary man' (until recently) living a small apartment and conducting a life style typical of average people.

At this point the form of the political discourse needs more analytical attention. This aspect is crucial in understanding why the Lega has been successful in establishing a mobilizing new conflict in Italian society. The collective action framing of the Lega can be conceived of as remarkably successful in bridging the gap between abstract political framing dominant in mass media and the public discourse dominant in a life-world context. Three notions can be pointed to in indicating how a new and potent political consciousness has been generated: 1. simplification, 2. concretization, 3. personification. It should be noted in this context that these features of political framing correspond to those characteristics typical of populist actors.

1. Social and political problems are interpreted by the Lega along the lines of a polarized and simultaneously highly emotionalized conflict between two groups in a divided society. Both the 'evil' and the 'good' can easily be located and identified by pointing to the opposition between the honest north and the corrupt south. In a highly simplistic way all malfunctions of Italian society are mono-causally explained by the consequences of the centralized nation-state. The political discourse of the Lega negates the actual complexity of problems and reduces them to an expression of an almighty and frightening state machinery (driven by corrupt politicians, parties and the mafia). The injustice frame built on the notion of the discrimination against the northern regions is broad enough to ultimately serve as an interpretative scheme for any field of politics.

A critical element in this simplified, but polarizing and mobilizing belief system is the image of an omnipotent adversary. As becomes particularly evident in a later period of the Lega's mobilization, as a protest movement against the establishment the Lega evokes the picture of a state run by indefinite, but all encompassing power structures. The affective side of the Lega's campaigns is mainly due to the simplistic features of a conspiracy theory. Here, the Lega portrays itself as the only legitimate and capable force to fight this bulwark of established interests remote from the concerns of 'normal citizens'.

2. The starting point of the Lega's campaigns have often been concrete experience in daily life. Be it the manifest inefficiency of public services, the failed integration of immigrants or the obscure and seemingly arbitrary tax policy of the Italian state, the issues raised by the Lega are closely linked to the immediate experience of Italian citizens. As Gamson observes: "To sustain collective action, the targets identified by the frame must successfully bridge abstract and concrete." (Gamson 1992b:33) The Lega's framing has been organized accordingly. The concrete malfunction of societal life are interpreted as the direct result of

the abstract structures of the Italian nation-state. The need for broad political reform is linked convincingly to outrage about malfunctions in communal life. As Gianfranco Miglio, formerly the ideologically head of the Lega, stated:

Now that the grand ideal beliefs are finished all the daily problems emerge. And it is this that the leaders of the Lega have understood when they decided to give privilege to concrete and almost banal issues (...). They are attentive to what the people say. (Miglio cited in Rizzi 1990: 136)

Bossi and his associates have effectively managed to refer to political discussion and complaints in the population which have traditionally been beyond official political discourse. The attraction of the Lega's campaign can thus be interpreted as a successful attempt to rephrase popular beliefs along new cleavages organized around highly concrete concerns and, by doing so, attributing them with so far unknown political dignity.

3. As many protest movements have been forced to learn, in modern society power structures and dominant authorities have become anonymous and often abstract. Opposition to certain phenomena is in danger of losing its easily identifiable political adversary. In highly complex society it has become difficult to blame single agents for being responsible for the problems. The attacked authorities are barely feasible as an actor which can be symbolically challenged or politically attacked. To draw loosely on Luhmann, a society organized by systemic procedures and necessities is only very barely subject to fundamental political conflicts. The fight against nebulous power structures lacks the affective dimension and prospect of success indispensable for any lasting political mobilization.

In the case of the Lega, however, an eminently significant event such as *tangentopoli* helped this movement to overcome the endemic difficulty of coherent protest formation. The revelations about the clientelistic and corrupt practices of the former regime made a distribution of guilt straightforward. The frame of being betrayed by unresponsive and unscrupulous politicians became a concrete reference point. The need for political change became more pressing with every politician that was, in the light of the cameras, put into prison (for a certain period in 1993 the Italian public witnessed images of politicians being arrested almost daily).

Corresponding to these more theoretical reflections, from the in-depth interviews emerges an initially astonishing, and for a populist movement illustrative, result. The overwhelming majority of those interviewed did not dispose of or were simply not interested in complex ideological questions. The strong commitment to the Lega that finds its expression in a distinct antagonism towards the political opponents (firstly, traditional parties and politicians) was contrasted by an unwillingness to talk about concrete programmatic and

organizational differences<sup>63</sup>. The mobilizing picture of an omnipresent and threatening enemy has replaced the detailed debate with the political opponent and the discussion of concrete steps toward political reform.

### 7.3.2. A Portrait of the Lega's Constituency

Some general demographic and empirical considerations are useful in gaining a better understanding of the mobilizing processes at the level of the Lega's political activists and sympathizers. The group we are concerned with is characterized by a higher degree of political commitment than the average electorate. The first of the following figures are taken from an empirical research on the Lega's electoral success which was conducted on the basis of 243 interviews with activists or strong supporters of the Lega Lombarda. This study was carried out in 1989 and the interviews were spread over Lombardy<sup>64</sup>.

One striking result of the study is the age factor regarding the members of the group, who describe themselves as very close to the Lega Lombarda in their political stand. The majority (56%) of them was younger than 30 and the numerically most important group was that of committed supporters aged between 18 and 25 years<sup>65</sup>. Furthermore, my own interviews with Lega activists indicate that the vast majority has never before been actively engaged in politics. They are rarely socialized by other political parties or movements. The Lega is for them often the first political force they consider worthwhile. With limitations it is thus reasonable to argue that the rise of the Lega Lombarda can be seen - at least with respect to the participatory level - as an articulation of the political aspirations of the younger, politically inexperienced generation.

The educational background of the Lega supporters can be labeled as medium or even high. Of those interviewed, 28% attended university or an educational institution of equal standing. The majority (46.7%), however, had completed the *scuola superiore* and had found occupations mostly in technologically advanced sectors of the economy. The group of small business- and craftsmen (as well as that of farmers and the civil servants) among the

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<sup>63</sup> One question which was rarely coherently answered is the following: Claiming that the Lega has nothing in common with the other, traditional parties, could explain me in which way the Lega is different?

<sup>64</sup> See: Cesareo/ Rovati (1989). Some data about the demographic profile of activists is also available in: E Cipputi salì sul carroccio', Corriere della Sera, December 10, 1991.

<sup>65</sup> Figures are taken from: Cesario & Rovati (1989).

sympathizers of the Lega are over-represented compared to the population in Lombardy<sup>66</sup>. These results are all the more interesting as these figures differ substantially from those for the parents of the interviewees. For example, 61% of the fathers and 52.9% of the mothers completed only elementary school (*scuola obbligo*). These differences with regard to educational background may be partly due to an overall inter-generational change. Nonetheless, they tend to underline the picture of the Lega's activists and electorate which is characterized as aspiring middle class. Against this background Mannheim states that the traditional, relatively prosperous middle class can be identified as the 'central nucleus' of the Lega's political project (Mannheimer 1991). They are thus comparatively wealthier than their student peers who have been the main driving force in former social movements.

Notwithstanding these characteristics it has been shown in another recent study that there are more young working class people in the Lega than there were in the Communist Party, or that there now are in the Party of the Left (P.D.S.)<sup>67</sup>. Thus, a distinct political orientation could not be inferred from these statistical figures. Since the Lega is strong in traditionally non-leftist areas, it is clear that one should exclude mechanistic explanations that see in the crisis of Marxism and in the ideologically 'homeless' working class a reservoir for new activism or more precisely for the Lega.

Likewise, it is premature to conclude from this that the Lega Lombarda can be perceived as a political phenomenon in the right-wing political spectrum<sup>68</sup>. Although this fact as such does not clarify the political stand of the Lega it is worth considering that the traditional right wing activists come from a radically different background, a largely urban one, either upper class or lower class. Conversely the Lega's supporters generally come from small and medium sized towns or villages (for example, Milan is the city in which the Lega has traditionally been least successful in elections). As there is no personal or organizational continuity with former - leftist - social movements there is no such connection with their right-wing counterparts<sup>69</sup>.

As well as making use of already existing political and social networks in workplaces and schools which provided former social movements with an environment accessible to their

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<sup>66</sup> See: Mannheim (1991:122-158) (Figure 4, p.128).

<sup>67</sup> Documented in Corriere della sera, March 16, 1992.

<sup>68</sup> See discussion in chapter 7.4.4.

<sup>69</sup> See for example: Poche (1992).

political goals<sup>70</sup> the Lega has formed its own supportive network of social relations. In terms of recruiting activists the Lega appeals to existing groups of friends or seeks to form networks through aggregating people who might know each other superficially because of the small size of their communities. As several personal interviews have shown, the Lega often gains influence on entire circles, or people who know one another superficially, such as people already affiliated to recreational clubs.

Beyond the flows of votes a closer analysis of the Lega's electorate shows that a relatively homogenous socio-cultural background can be identified. Focusing on the social conditions conducive to the Lega, Vimercati, based on intuitive findings rather than on empirical research, describes similar patterns with respect to Varese, a stronghold of the Lega:

This rich province at the frontier (to Switzerland) is the ideal 'incubator' for the Lega: far enough apart from the metropolis where the control of the parties is 'too' efficient; industrialized but still sensitive to the enticement of local community; prosperous but impoverished by an excessive tax burden and by the economic crisis which reached its peak at the beginning of the 1980s; periphery and a bit pious, but open on the hand to the cultural influences of Milan and on the other hand of nearby Switzerland (..)(Vimercati, 1990:46)

To become politically influential as a social movement the Lega Lombarda had to appeal to a unifying communal feeling, beyond the narrow boundaries of local communities. With respect to this aspect of identity formation the results of the study, firstly, show that the vast majority of people - especially in the countryside (77.4%) - were born in the place at which they lived at the time of the interview. Since the sympathizers of the Lega mostly come from small towns (and stay there) where they are seldom exposed to different ways of living it is appropriate to describe their lifeworld experiences as barely 'cosmopolitan' (Diamanti & Riccamboni 1992).

Secondly, as might have been expected, the supporters of the Lega feel most strongly bound to the region, Lombardy, in comparison to other territorial ties. This portrait of attitudes toward the geographical entity is all the more interesting in that a survey conducted in 1984 shows that in Lombardy the attachment to the Italian nation was far stronger than that to the region (11.7% to 3.7%). Another study from 1986 shows in addition that at this time the feelings of belonging to the region especially among young people in Lombardy was not

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<sup>70</sup> Feminism, Pacifism and Ecologism may appear too qualitatively different among each other to be usefully compared in this way. However, a recent paper by Della Porta and Rucht has shown that it is illuminating to consider even movements that are apparently quite dissimilar as constituting a "family" of related social movements. A concept narrower than that of "Social Movement Industry", but broader than a single movement allows one to see how activists make concrete choices in their allocation of personal resources. See: Della Porta/ Rucht (1992) and Rucht (1992/93).

significantly different from those in other regions<sup>71</sup>. Moreover, at this time the identification with a social class or professional group was significantly more important than the identification with the territory<sup>72</sup>. It is thus reasonable to say that in the initial period of its activity the Lega could not make use of a significant territorial attachment with reference to which it would have been possible to define spontaneously a new political actor. This has rather been the result of a long-standing symbolic struggle.

In contrast to the early 1980s more recent surveys on the attitudes of Lega sympathizers show the crucial status of ties with Lombardy. The region is followed by Europe, the Western World (*Mondo occidentale*), and the province as objects of attachment. Not surprisingly the Italian nation-state ranks second last. The fact that a rather abstract territorial entity such as the 'Western world' is defined as crucial with respect to feelings of belonging sheds light on the socio-cultural background of the Lega's followers and, more generally, on the mentality of the people in the Italian north. For them the distinction between the notion of *Mittleuropa* of which the north of Italy is said to be part and the so-called *mediterranea*, the Mediterranean countries, is highly important for their self-assessment. People in Lombardy in particular identify with a distinct Northern European culture, its work ethic and the accompanying views of efficiency, personal duty and material well-being. As will be shown later the notion of superiority as the underlying rationality for and as the emblematic expression of this distinction is easily exploitable in ideological terms in order to generate anti-southern feelings. The traditional economic as well as cultural split of Italy into two parts is successfully used by the Lega to define its own identity as well as to mobilize people in the name of the 'authentic' virtues of the north<sup>73</sup>.

The electorate of the Lega unquestionably shares the central characteristics of its activists especially with respect to socio-cultural attitude. Here it is first of all important to be aware of the fact that the Lega was able to build up its consensus predominantly in those areas traditionally shaped by a strong Catholic subculture (see Natale 1991). The other critical factor shaping the value structure of the typical Lega supporter is the lifeworld shaped by

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<sup>71</sup> Source: IARD, survey on the basis with a sample of 3133 people with an age ranging from 15 to 24.

<sup>72</sup> See: Sondaggio Lombardia 1984, Istituto Superiore di Sociologia, published in Biorcio (1991:53).

<sup>73</sup> Regarding their value orientation and the corresponding incentive to sympathize with the Lega, Diamanti operates with five categories of Lega supporters: the "disappointed, the particularistic, intolerant, localist and 'efficientist' ones. Their respective framing of social and political reality is widely reflected the focal points of the Lega's political discourse.

localist features far remote from metropolitan life and its political-cultural discourses and ideas. Costantini summarizes the results of an empirical study amongst Lega supporters conducted in 1989 (Cesareo & Rovati 1989) as follows:

The survey indicates the subsequent typical image of a Lega supporter: relatively young, trained for a medium-high professional career, income above the national and regional average, politically moderate, more attached to work values than those of solidarity, more regionalist than statalist, lives predominantly in Lombardy, let alone a practicing catholic. (Costantini 1994: 41-42)<sup>74</sup>

To classify the electorate of the Lega one has to face a major difficulty: such a recent political actor as the Lega Lombarda is a phenomenon in a state of constant change. With its success the spectrum of the electorate audience has widened and it has partly changed its socio-cultural characteristics. Mannheimer shows that, at least in Milan, in the period from 1989 to 1991 a process of 'normalization' had been taking place in this respect. Men are no longer dominant among the voters, nor is any one of the age groups particularly strong in comparison to the average vote (Mannheimer 1991:126ff.).<sup>75</sup> The results of the national election in 1992 indicate, however, that at this stage some particular characteristics regarding the composition of the Lega's electorate can still be identified. The most significant is probably that about half of the those who voted for the Lega are younger than 35<sup>76</sup>, a characteristic which the Lega shares only with the Green Party.

If one analyzes the constituency and voters of the Lega, it is striking that there is no continuity with preceding social movements or protest groups. The typical activist of this regionalist movement does not come from the 'New Middle Class' which - according to many scholars - is mostly inclined to breed those individuals that are willing to engage in protest groups. In contrast to the social group of young and highly educated people with post-materialist values who are said to be easily mobilized, the activists of the Lega normally come

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<sup>74</sup> A more impressionistic and narratively envisaged, although rather less appropriate picture of the prototypical *leghista* of the 1980s draws Carlo Brambilla: "The *leghista* is a man in revolt. A simple person who loves concrete things, facts not words. He simply can not take it any more. He hates ideology and looks at the persons. Despising the concepts of the left and the right, meaningless categories for him, he seeks to turn to solid facts. He is not an intellectual, and he does not like them. In his spare-time he loves sport, playing tennis and soccer. But he reads little. ... The *leghista* loves the family. He often speaks about the problems of the youth, favoring laws which support young couples looking for an apartment near their parents' place. He is, however, laical, absolutely laical. He believes in God but not in the priests... He is in favor of abortion, divorce and civil rights. He is animated by a strong localist xenophobia. He simply does not adores diverse people." (La Repubblica, 12.5.1990)

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of the contemporary portray of the Lega's supporters social profile see section 7.4.4.

<sup>76</sup> Statistics of Doxa, published in La Repubblica, 'Il terremoto del cinque aprile', April, 8. 1992, p.11.

from a significantly different social background (the social group of small businessmen, self-employed craftsmen, and dealers located in small or middle-sized towns is comparatively strong)<sup>77</sup>. The typical supporter of the Lega has a low middle class background with a solid (non-academic) education and an average income. In this respect the Lega matches the typical characteristics of populist movements whose constituency is mainly composed neither of social elites nor of the working class, the latter of which normally has strong ideological and political ties with traditional organizations (unions/ socialist party). The case of the Lega thus fits Minkenberg and Inglehart's characterization of 'populist right movements', according to which these political actors find support among the 'old middle class' which is increasingly threatened by the ongoing social and cultural change (Minkenberg & Inglehart 1989, see also: Betz 1993).

### 7.3.3. The Reaction of the Italian Public: Stigmatization and Repression

As explained in the theoretical section, the role of mass media is crucial in redefining social cleavages and in forming new political actors. In the case of the Lega this role was, however, a highly ambiguous one. Whilst running openly against the entire establishment and initially being categorically rebuked by the media, subsequently the Lega was successful in attracting public attention. In the course of its mobilization the Lega succeeded in using negative media framing effectively, and step by step built up its own access to public discourse. The attitude of the main newspapers and television channels itself has changed this process substantially from a unanimously hostile perspective to one that can be described, if not as friendly, as highly responsive to the emergence of the Lega, its framing of political issues and its pertaining critique of the 'political class'.

The first phase of latency<sup>78</sup> of the Lega's political engagement was characterized by an effective negation of its existence at least in the major nationally designed newspapers.

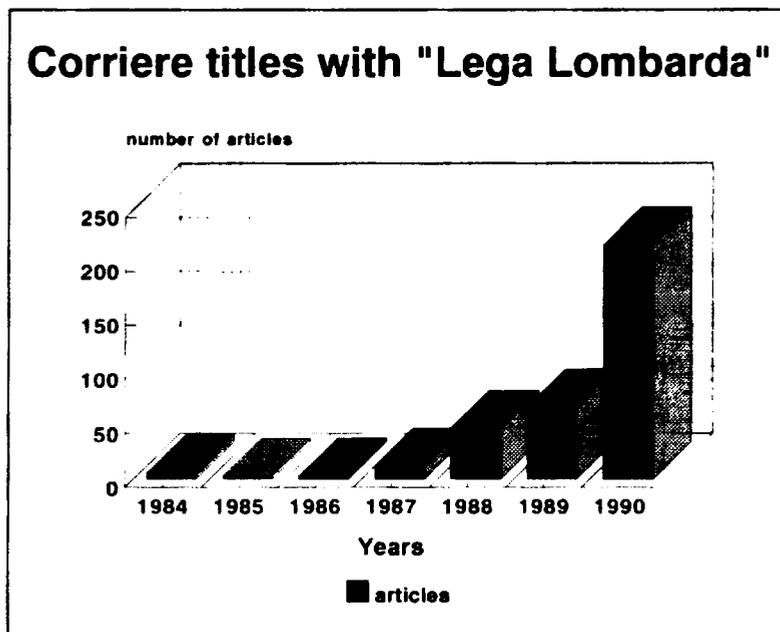
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<sup>77</sup> See the study of Mannheim on the social base of the Lega's electorate: Mannheim, 'Chi vota Lega e perché', in: Mannheim, Renato/ Biorcio R. (eds.), *La Lega Lombarda* Milano: Feltrinelli, 1991, p.122-158. The *Istituto di ricerca sociali IARD* from Milan just recently conducted a study with a sample of 2500 young voters (19-25) which shows that the 'typical' voter of the Lega is "young, male, has an educational title of (lower) middle standard, is coming from the province and is inclined to adapt to racist, however, not right-wing positions." (*La Repubblica*, 20.1.93, p.10). See for this study a forthcoming publication in the Italian journal *Il Mulino*.

<sup>78</sup> The classification of the four subsequently described phases of the Lega's relationship with the media is taken from Constantini (1994).

If the Lega was mentioned it was either in the context of racist or folklorist events. Generally, the Lega and the political issues it raised were simply an anathema in public discourse. It was partly due to this attitude that the Lega operated for a long time in a state of quasi clandestinity, attracting public attention only in a very local context. This first phase in the relationship between the Lega and the mass media lasted until around 1987 when the success of Bossi's organization at the general elections made the silence about this new political actor redundant.

The subsequent phase, referred to by Constantini as the onset (Constantini 1994:91), persisted until 1989 when the elections for the European Parliament marked a watershed towards a new qualitative step in this relationship. In this period there emerged a new interest in the Lega; it was perceived for the first time as a serious political agent rather than as a bizarre transitory occurrence. Particularly on the local level in the northern regions of the country public awareness of the Lega flourished. This was mainly due to the communal elections which were held in 1988 in Lombardy and in which the Lega had outstanding results<sup>79</sup>.



<sup>79</sup> The subsequent phases, those of visibility (1989-1992) and of dominance (1992-94), will be commented on in chapter 7.4.2.1.

However, the Lega's visibility on a national level also increased as a result of media attention. Figure 1 shows the number in titles of the influential newspaper Corriere Della Sera that include the phrase Lega Lombarda in different years. It is striking that from 1987 onwards we have a kind of 'take-off' in the media interest in the Lega. Correspondingly, the Lega was able to catch the attention of a significant part of the Italian public: according to a survey conducted by Il Giornale in 1990 already 73% of those questioned said they knew what the Lega was<sup>80</sup>.

In addition the Lega profited from its seat in Rome with respect to an enhanced public visibility. Bossi's activity in Parliament brought concern from politicians as well as the attention of a broader audience to the new political force on the Italian scene. Nonetheless, in these years the Lega and its representative in Parliament did not gain any substantial political influence within the institutional framework of national politics. However, with its constant proposals and provocations the Lega has become a steady factor in politics as well as in public discussion. Public visibility and the possibility to ascribe to a political actor distinct political ideas and interests is itself a dynamic element in the process of changing the political attitudes of a significant part of the population (Pizzorno 1981).

Notwithstanding the growing prominence of the Lega in public discourse, the general attitude of the press towards the leagues remained negative in this period. The former general director of the Corriere della Sera, Piero Ottone, recognized that "successful regional *leghe* have obtained votes without the support of the press."<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the well-known columnist Vittorio Feltri writes:

The *leghe* have been ridiculed by national television and by private television channels; they have been 'flunked' by the quality press which accused them of every possible iniquity. They have been snubbed by the 'barons' of politics. Yet, they have been successful in the face of traditional parties. (Feltri 1991:5)

Public opinion has also been wary of the Lega. In the formative period critics of the Lega Lombarda argued that while its leaders seek legitimacy through enlightened discussion of federalism and the rights of ethnic groups to self-determination, its activists are often uneducated and vulgar racists. With regard to most political actors, the opposition to the leagues has been complete and uncompromising. During its formative years the Lega was

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<sup>80</sup> The results of this survey, documented in Il Giornale April 29, 1990, furthermore shows that 32.1% of the respondents indicated that they would vote for the Lega. The prominence of the Lega in public awareness is hence accompanied by an increased political acceptance of this new political force.

<sup>81</sup> See: Piero Ottone, "Se nasce davvero la lega nazionale ", La Repubblica, Dec 7, 1991, p.1.

almost unanimously either ignored or rigorously condemned. The table on the following page shows the opinion of political leaders and prominent MPs with regard to the league.

These statements were made after the electoral success of the Lega in Brescia in the winter of 1991. They are quite representative in reflecting the reactions of the established political actors vis-à-vis the Lega persistent until the early 1990s; they show an attitude of total rejection. The strategy applied by the Italian public, be it the mass media, politicians or academia, can be described as a mixture of underestimation and stigmatization. The only parties that even consider the possibility of political relationships with the Lega are the extremely small Liberal Party (2 per cent) and the Radical Party, even smaller. All the other parties were resolved to confront the Lega in this period. Opposition is often conducted with the weapon of irony and sarcasm<sup>82</sup>. The Lega is portrayed as a group of uneducated, parochial and rough small-village dwellers. Its activists have been called "an army of uneducated villagers who

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Answers to the question: "Who want to collaborate with the Lega MP's?" in *L'Espresso* (No. 49, Dec. 8, 1991 p. 18):

**Nicola Mancino**, Christian Democrat (DC): "It would be a moronic party would now say that it is available to negotiate with them."

**Mino Martinazzoli**, Christian Democrat: "My only problem is to that of taking votes away from the Lega. This should be done with political argumentation, not with technical stratagems."

**Ciso Gitti**, DC: "We should talk with the citizens, not with them."

**Alfredo Reichlin**, Party of the Left (ex-PCI): "We ostracized the MSI (neofascists) for ideological reasons, with the lega it is for a political reason. At present their program is subversive. We shall see what they have to say here (in Parliament)."

**Giulio Quercini**, Party of the Left (ex-PCI): "The rapport will depend on their proposals. So far their project is incompatible with democratic order".

**Salvo Ando**, Socialist Party: "This is a destructive movement. A relationship with them is unthinkable."

**Ugo Intini**, Socialist Party: "An alliance is impossible because the Lega is the provincial expression of a dangerous right-wing movement which is spreading in the West, and because it is undoing national unity".

**Antonio Cariglia**, Socialist Democratic Party: "They are too similar to the European racist movements..."

**Antonio del Pennino**, Italian Republican Party: "If they persist with the proposal of three republics, nothing can be done..."

**Stelio de Carolis**, Italian Republican Party: "No, they are racists."

**Gianfranco Fini**, Italian Social Movement (neofascists): "As long as they are against the nation, there is nothing to talk about."

**Egitto Sterpa**, Liberal Party "In politics the only untouchables are those who steal."

**Francesco Rutelli**, Greens: "They don't achieve anything..."

**Marco Pannella**, Republican Party: "To me only the partitocrazia is untouchable."

**Franco Bassanini**, Independent Left: "They are too far from our values of life."

**Luclio Libertini**, Communist Re-foundation: "...They will finish like the Uomo Qualunque Movement." (disappear)

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Selected reactions of the Italian political establishment to the rise of the Lega

<sup>82</sup> Fusella has added an illuminating book, documenting how the main newspapers in Italy commented on the rise of the Lega (Fusella 1993). The title of the book summarizes many of the statements from the early period: *Arrivano i barbari* ('The barbarians arrive').

challenge the Italian intelligentsia" by the media. This has typically been the attitude of the intellectuals, who have also demeaned the Lega's independence focus as nostalgic, irrelevant or utopian. For instance, the Lega has pushed for the teaching of the Lombard dialect in schools, and its use in naming streets. With clear reference to this issue Alberto Arbasino, a well-known intellectual writes:

Languages, dialects, ethnic groups, large and small nations... Elegant Italians in our major cities know only one language. They use it identically in all public and private occasions, and it works very well. They might change language when they go abroad. As vulgarity increases the ways of talking multiply. (*La Repubblica*, Dec. 7, 1991, p.8)

It is interesting to see how far the Italian public, or more precisely the population in the Northern regions, formed its opinion according to this negative media framing. The survey documented in the next figure shows that in 1990, even amongst the assigned potential constituency of the Lega Lombarda, the dominant public view interpreted the Lega around ethno-regional features. At this time the Lega was predominantly seen as a racist and conservative political force defending the interests of the indigenous population. Interestingly, at this point in time the Lega's opposition to the power of traditional parties was not determining for the public's perception of this new political actor.

Regarding the actual impact of the negative press coverage on the political mobilization, the rise of the Lega can be interpreted as a striking example of the dynamic inherent in public discourse. The discriminatory practice of the mass media aiming at discrediting the Lega as an acceptable political actor gave birth to a climate in which the Lega was able to effectively perform its radical oppositional role. The presence of the Lega in public discourse, although under a dissenting

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**Survey of Europeo (1990): 'How would you define the Lega Lombarda?'**

Racist	46.7%
'Qualunquista'	26.7%
Conservative	39.4%
Beat the predominance of the parties	26.2%
Defend interests of Lombards	44.3%
Nothing/ Do not know the Lega	17.0%

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Survey of 705 adults in Lombardy (*Europeo*, March 31, 1990)

token, affirmed its basic aspirations and made its aspirations to debated issues. Evidently, the political environment was conducive to converting the 'ban' on the Lega into a productive resource for political mobilization. As Bossi unpretentiously framed it, summarizing the Lega's attitude towards the press: "Speak about us, good or bad does not matter; this was our

motto." (Bossi/ Vimercati 1992: 99) Along the same lines Manconi accurately says regarding the Lega's capacity to use the negative media framing:

And like this, every label hastily adhered was easily transformed into a banner, a virtue designed to strengthen the own identity stirring a complex of persecution that fortifies motivation and passion.<sup>83</sup>

This became possible, firstly, because the Lega knew how to raise and conflictualize themes about which specific sectors of the Italian were highly responsive. In a particular way the Lega was able to be sensitive to the grievances of its electorate on the basis of the antagonism it had to face from main-stream press coverage<sup>84</sup>. Secondly, by effectively reframing the mass media's animosity, Bossi and his associates made it feasible to use the negative labels adopted giving them a 'positive' and stimulating message. As shall be shown in more detail below, the image of an uncultured outcast was constructed as an anti-elitist value; its unrefined style of campaigns decoded as the virtue of not being part of the establishment<sup>85</sup>.

#### 7.3.4. Towards the Expansion of Regionalism

At the beginning of the 1990s the Lega reached a critical turning point in its political mobilization. Until this stage in its development the Lega was predominantly organized in regionally very distinct entities with a related political agenda designed along the lines of traditional regionalism. Although from the beginning basing its protest on an ample and multi-side critique of the nation-state, its main political aspirations were built on the particularistic claims of the region. This applied a severe restriction in terms of its geographical reach, as regarding the social groups as a dormant mobilization potential. At the beginning of the 1990s the Lega stood at the crossroads, either to establish itself as a traditional regionalist movement

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<sup>83</sup> Manconi, L. 'Le etichette negative aiutano i "lumbard', in: La Stampa, September 8, 1992.

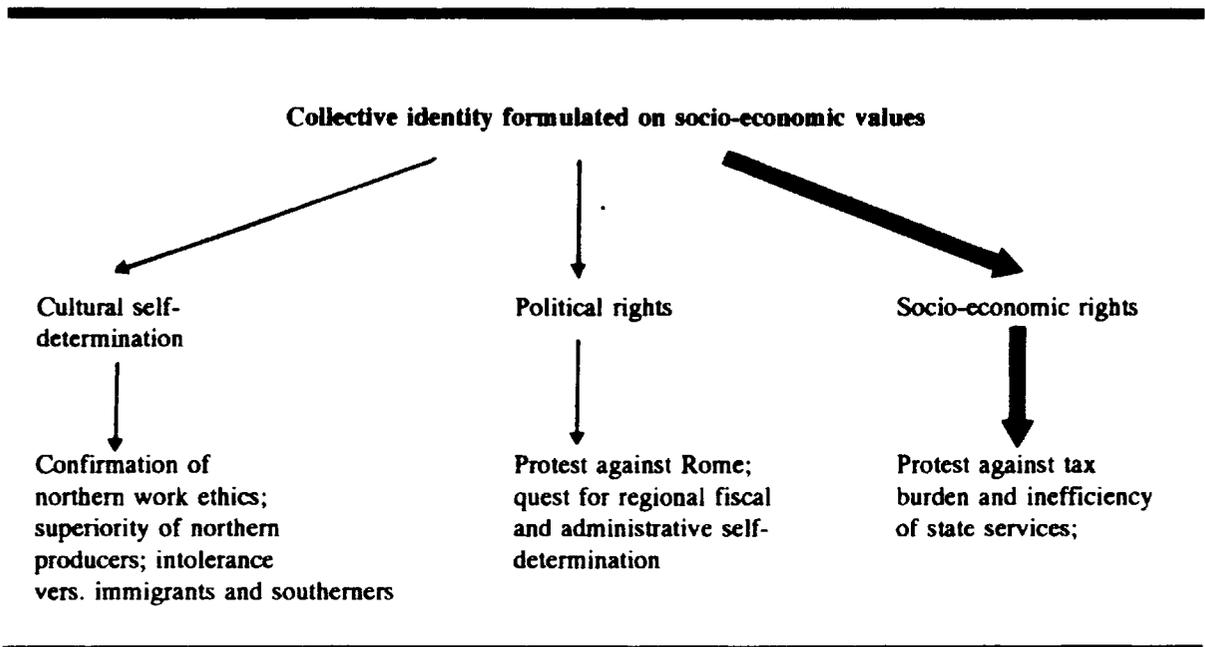
<sup>84</sup> On this point see for this discussion chapter 7.4.2.

<sup>85</sup> Another aspect of the press's hostility is its impact on processes of internal identity formation, indicating a clear dividing line between 'us' from the Lega and 'them' from the Roman establishment. Leoni, one of the leading politicians of the Lega, describes the consequences of the negative media framing on the internal cohesion of the movement as follows: "The attacks of the regime's press that evidently aimed at harming us has actually never had the chance to obstruct the machine of the Lega Lombarda. The attacks were obviously mainly directed against the senator Bossi, national secretary of the Lega Lombarda, because he represents the 'key' to our movement. The effect has however been the contrary of what the instigators originally intended: it rather firmed the consensus of the militant for their *gran capo* (great leader/ O.S.) than dividing them.." G. Leoni in Lombardia Autonomista, No. 3, 1988

in the prosperous northern part of Italy or to change its political identity towards a national design. Opting for the second alternative the Lega faced the necessity of overcoming the structural restrictions on political mobilization set by the very nature of regionalist protest. To continue a political framing predominantly concentrating themes such as regional self-determination and autonomy for the Italian nation-state would have meant excluding significant social groups from the Lega's political projects; groups that, in general, were more and more inclined to express their discontent with the political establishment of the country (Mazzoleni 1990). Experiencing the first nationally notable electoral successes, a substantial broadening of the mobilization became feasible under the premise of finding a common and attractive political denominator for the different leagues.

To accomplish a widening of its political mobilization, the Lega had to change the emphasis in its political discourse. In the late 1980s the focal point of the Lega's campaigns was primarily on polemically addressing the drain of resources from the northern regions. Accordingly, the collective identity in this period was primarily formulated in terms of a work ethics which was said to establish irreconcilable dividing lines between the northern regions and the southern part of the country including the Roman state apparatus. Positively framed as the community of the northern producers and polemically demarcated from immigrants or south Italians, communal feeling were fabricated beyond ethnic standards. This image of collective identity found its expression in a political agenda formulated in line with traditional forms of regionalism: The main objective was to redistribute national wealth according to standards formulated on the basis of each region's productive capacity. This inescapably gave the Lega the image of representing the 'well-offs', renouncing to the idea of national solidarity and promoting selfish political aims. As documented in the figure below, the emphasis in the Lega's political discourse was accordingly on socio-economic rights. The tax issue and the misuse of (northern) public money became the primary target of its public campaigns. Issues related to issues in national politics did not get as much attention in this period.

With an accordingly framed political identity, the Lega was not able to benefit from the new opportunities in a political system in profound transformation. The intensified ideological depolarization and the corresponding declining integrative power of the traditionally dominant political subcultures gave space to new patterns of mobilization in Italian politics. The task of the Lega in spurring its political mobilization was twofold: firstly, to constructively meet the prevailing public opinion characterizing it as a racist, narrow




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**Figure:** Emphasis in Lega's political discourse in second phase

minded and egoist force from Lombardy and Veneto promoting illegitimate particularistic interests. Secondly, the Lega had to co-ordinate the so far only loosely connected leagues in terms of combining the material and ideological resources they respectively had at their disposal. To meet these requirements a further redefinition of its collective identity and amplification of its communicated interpretative frames became necessary. The demarcating boundaries of the community had to be enlarged in such a way that the Lega could gain political attraction beyond the so far regionally assigned constituency in the north. In its rhetorical strategy the Lega was constrained to transcend the immediacy of territorial belonging and naked self-interest. Correspondingly, the political discourse needed to be reframed extending the scope of the political goals and presenting the Lega as a political agent on a par with other, nationally operating parties.

#### 7.4. The 'Take-off' of the Leagues (1990-1992)

The early 1990s mark the period of the Lega's decisive break-through as a significant political actor on the national scene. Some surprising successes in communal elections had already indicated a development that culminated in the general elections in April 1992 (Table V). In the regional elections of May 1990, the Lega Lombardia became the second strongest political force in Lombardy (18.9%) and nationally the Lega could almost treble its share in valid votes (from 1.6% in 1989's European elections to then 4.4.%). The year 1990 marks a watershed in the Lega's mobilization insofar as for the first time the Lega was confirmed as a nationally relevant force, effectively challenging at least in the north the hegemony of the governing bloc.

Parallel to its electoral success in this period the Lega largely expanded its organizational apparatus affirming itself as a political actor present at all political levels in the north. At a time when traditional parties experienced a considerable decline in support, the Lega generated a mobilization dynamic by which it increasingly gained material and ideological resources. As Moiola comments on the developments in the early 1990s:

While today all the other parties have to deal with the crisis of political militancy and the declining commitment of its supporters, particularly amongst the young generation with which it wants to communicate; while these parties have to face a more and more crumbling financial and economic situation....., the movement of the leagues encounters a increasingly firm dedication of its militants as it enjoys the increase in material support which probably qualifies the Lega as the emerging political force of the 1990s. (Moioli 1991: 59)

The outstanding, albeit regionally still highly restricted, electoral success meant new prospects for the Lega's political development. For the first time, the access to formalized political power became feasible. In some councils the Lega came to represent a no longer negligible political weight with the outspoken goal of forming local government. At this stage

**Table V** General elections in 1992; vote in Italy and Lombardy

Party	Italy %	Lombardy %
DC	24.51	24.1
PDS	13.32	12.1
Rif. Com.	4.64	4.9
PSI	11.25	12.6
Lega Nord	7.15	23.0
MSI	4.44	3.4
PRI	3.36	4.1
Verdi	2.30	3.2
PSDI	2.24	1.3
Rete	1.54	1.6
Pannella	1.03	1.4
Other	4.25	5.3

of its political development the Lega's political identity of a radical agent of opposition prohibited it from accepting any form of cooperation with traditional parties. But still, the electoral results made the option of acquiring institutional political power feasible for the first time. Consequently, the early 1990s mark a critical period of re-orientation in terms of the adopted form of political struggle<sup>86</sup>.

In spite of the Lega's impressive electoral success, in this period, however, it largely remained a *persona non grata* in political terms. Even if the established political parties have come to recognize the Lega as a serious competitor on the political scene, at this early stage of their decline they rigorously refused to accept any model of formalized cooperation. An illustration of this refusal are 1992's communal elections in which the Lega won in some of the North Italian cities over 30% of the valid vote. Still, even with a majority the Lega was initially not able to form a coalition; its political isolation prevailed<sup>87</sup>. Accordingly, the Lega decided to form local administration only in those cases in which it won over 40%, and in exceptional cases with more than 35%, of the valid votes (Moioli 1991: 196)

#### 7.4.1. Strategies of Change of the Lega

If one of the established political parties was willing to cooperate at a communal political level with the Lega in this period, it was the PDS (at least in this particular period of the Lega's mobilization). Considering, however, that the Lega is in favor of a strict market-type liberalism of a Thatcherist design and that it has emerged in a traditionally conservative political setting (*zone bianche*), one could ask why the former Communist party (PDS) has become the main potential coalition partner at this local level. Here it is crucial to see that the PDS is first of all the major force of opposition. It is not highly disqualified by involvement in the scandals of *tangentopoli* as are the parties of the governing bloc. In the situation of the early 1990s there was realistically no other political option for the Lega to enter government on a national level but to form a coalition with one of the major traditional political forces in Italy. At this time the main adversary of the Lega was clearly the *pentapartito* guided by the Christian Democrats. It is in accordance with the Lega's political

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<sup>86</sup> Given the very nature of the Lega's political identity it is obvious what a rapprochement to established parties meant for this political force defined by the populist opposition against Roman government. Still in 1991 Bossi unambiguously declared: "We can not explain to the people that the posts occupied by us are different from the ones taken by the 'partitocracy'" Bossi in L'Unità, September 9, 1991.

<sup>87</sup> See for the example of Mantova: 'Bossi senza alleati, a Mantova si rivota', in: L'Unità, 30.11.1992.

identity as the 'honest and incorrupt political movement from the North' that it chooses those political forces for cooperation which are not primarily discredited by the ongoing legitimization crisis of the Italian political system (likewise the, however, politically less influential Greens and *La Rete*). With the latest revelations about the former Communist Party's involvement in corruptive practices and with the decline of the DC as a hegemonic force in Italian politics this reference to the PDS, however, has now become a matter of the past.

Regardless of this it has to be seen that the PDS is the party which is - perhaps next to the Republicans - most willing to give substantial rights to the regions (in public discussions Bossi and Occhetto, leader of the ex-Communists, disputed the question of who is the real and trustworthy advocate of regions' rights in Italy). In this context it is interesting to note that the Lega continuously stressed the point that its agreements with the PDS are not a sign of ideological correspondence, but designed to form a transitory government. Bossi stated that the strategy of the Lega is not shaped by an ideological bias but by the necessity to construct a 'government of technicians' that is able to bring about substantial change. The overall attitude of the Lega towards the PDS can thus most adequately be described as a strategic choice to promote local governments under its dominance. This entails two seemingly contradictory notions in the Lega's attitude towards this main party of the opposition: while using it against its fight against DC hegemony, with the gradual retreat of the Christian Democrats, Bossi harshly attacks the former Communists as being part of the prevailing coalition of the old parties striving for the preservation of their power base.

The second strategy the Lega has adopted to bring about substantial change in the political landscape of the Italian nation-state is that of striving for a far-reaching reorganization of the general framework of decision making in the political system. According to the "key project of the Lega" (L'Indipendente, 2.1.93) this would mean establishing a strong federal order and thereby giving the regions the power to become more influential in dictating their own agenda. In times of political stability this attempt to change the 'rules of the game' would probably be unrealistic and doomed to failure. However, under the impression of the deep crisis of the political establishment, and in a climate of ideological and organizational change and renewal which is pertinent to almost all of the traditional political forces, the proposal of federalism could not be easily ignored. Against the background of the deteriorating hegemony of the Christian Democrats and the profound identity crisis of the left, the Lega's political agenda has resonated strongly with the Italian public.

In its political discourse the Lega presented itself as a radical force of opposition challenging the dominance of all traditional parties. The years of the most extraordinary rise of the Lega were in fact those in which the Lega could legitimately claim to be outside the established logic of politics performed in Rome and to present the only radical resistance to it. The then complete and uncommitted protest against the practices of the political elite primarily benefitted from the accelerating legitimation crisis of the governing parties.

#### **7.4.2. The Emergence of Grievances: A Frame Analysis**

To assess the role played by the media and the development of the Lega's political identity with regard to the seemingly irresistible rise of the Lega Lombarda and the development of its political discourse, the coverage of themes central to the Lega's program was examined over a period of time. Through an analysis of activist materials, we identified the essential theme on which the Lega has focused its campaigns, namely the multiple inadequacies of the Italian state<sup>88</sup>. On the basis of this it was investigated whether this theme had received any media attention and when. The hypothesis was that the debate on this theme has grown significantly in recent years, alongside the rise of the Lega. In making this analysis we adopted, with some modifications, the methodology of frame analysis described by Gamson (1987). A preliminary examination of several media sources revealed a relevant congruence of themes between the media discourse and the Lega. They both focused on the fact that the Italian nation-state does not work; this general theme was articulated in various ways, which could be identified as several distinct frames. To be able to quantify the evolution of these frames over time, it was decided to concentrate on the opinion page of the newspaper LaRepubblica, during the period 1980-1990, sampling three months of each year. A preparatory review showed high homogeneity in the tone of the articles. Real competing frames emerged only occasionally; variation occurred mainly in terms of their frequency. Generally, the emphasis was in two areas: either on the corruption and inefficiency of the political system, or on the technical inadequacy of its products: the bureaucracy and the public services.

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<sup>88</sup> In identifying the political themes crucial for the Lega Lombarda the official publication of the Lega Nord/Lega Lombarda, the Lombardia Autonomista was examined. A sample of several months of this weekly was taken and the main political issues were identified, utilizing the methodology of frame analysis described in the methodological appendix.

Although both areas are also stressed in the Lega activist materials, there is an important difference in stressing one or the other. Whilst emphasizing the technical inefficiencies of the services can allow for a solution within the boundaries of the existing political system, criticizing the system itself is a more radical position that invites a substantial modification of Italian politics. Although emphasis on either area contributes to the undermining of the overall legitimacy of the system, it is useful to distinguish global and technical complaints as separate areas of concern.

An examination was made of how dissatisfaction with the performance of the state in general evolved over time, and how the attention devoted to each area changed. As described by the usual media language, the frames which were identified as an indicator of dissatisfaction with the political system were the following:

1. Political Corruption: Politicians engage in a profitable commerce of state resources and sometimes do so in association with organized crime.
2. Inefficient Political System: Italian political decision-making is based on excessive bureaucracy. In addition, the system requires constant compromises. This produces frequent stalemates and an insufficient representation of the voters' will. There is a fundamental difference between the way political institutions are supposed to work and the way they really work, which is often highly undemocratic.

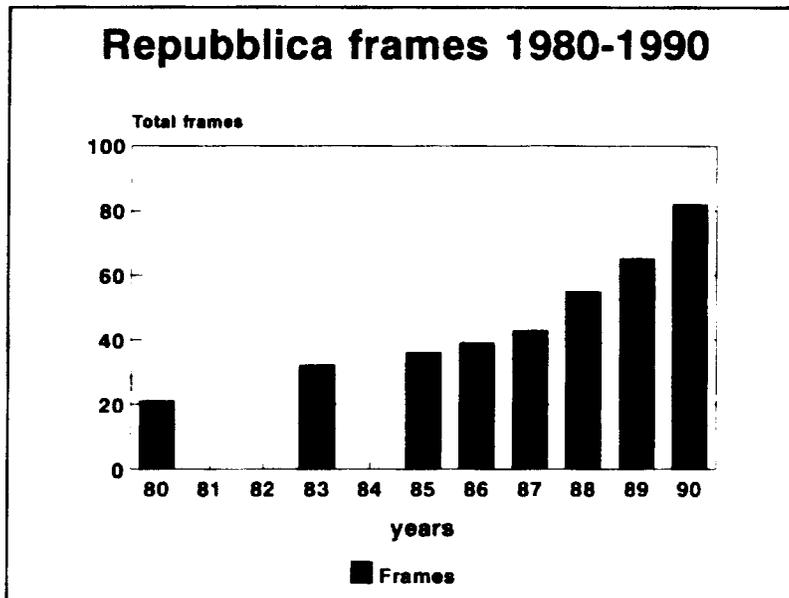
Conversely, the frames concerned with technical inadequacy were as follows:

3. Waste of Public Resources: Public goods are wasted by poor management and the needs of the political system to finance itself through illicit appropriations. Taxpayers pay for this inefficiency.
4. Inadequate State Services: All the public services are markedly inefficient. Personnel is incompetent, narrow-minded and overly bureaucratic.

A preliminary examination of a sample of articles showed relatively little ambiguity within each article. They generally expressed only one or, rarely, two dominant frames. Thus, it was possible to concentrate on the main tone of each article and each article that expressed one of the frames described above was counted as an occurrence<sup>89</sup>. The results are illustrated in table 2 in the methodological appendix and in the figure below.

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<sup>89</sup> The technical details of our analysis are described in the methodological appendix.



All the frames increased over time, in parallel with the electoral success of the Lega. The analysis shows a direct link between the timing of the success of the Lega and the progressive increase of media emphasis on the themes stressed by the Lega. Thus, even if the Lega's successes were condemned as a dangerous manifestations of racist and irresponsible attitudes, the objective convergence between the media worries and the Lega's program did not escape the voters' notice. More precisely, the actual revelations about the corruption scandals of *tangentopoli*, and the expansion of the *leghe* correspond to a general increase in media references to raising crime rates in the south and political corruption. Hence, it is possible to conceive that such a choice of themes had a favorable effect on the *leghe*. The Lega has assertively claimed that it is able to provide solutions to these problems. It would be inaccurate to infer the presence of a unidirectional link between media coverage and the Lega's success. Possibly, it has been a self-reinforcing process, which could not have occurred, however, without an implicit political agenda of large part of the Italian media. The La Repubblica, the largest selling newspaper, played a significant role in this respect.

If we look at the two separate areas identified, a difference between the La Repubblica frames and the Lega appears. The *leghe'* criticism is a radical condemnation of the Italian political system, which over the years remains constant in the activist literature. Conversely, over time La Repubblica emphasizes more and more the technical inadequacies. As Figure 9 shows, complaints about the inefficiency and corruption of the Italian political system increase, but less dramatically than complaints about wastes and the inadequacy of services

such as trains and hospitals. However, even if the emphasis was different, clearly the agenda of the Lega was never at odds with the implicit one of La Repubblica. What is important above all, is the fact that there is a convergence between the two in undermining the legitimacy of the Italian state as a moral entity and as a provider of services.

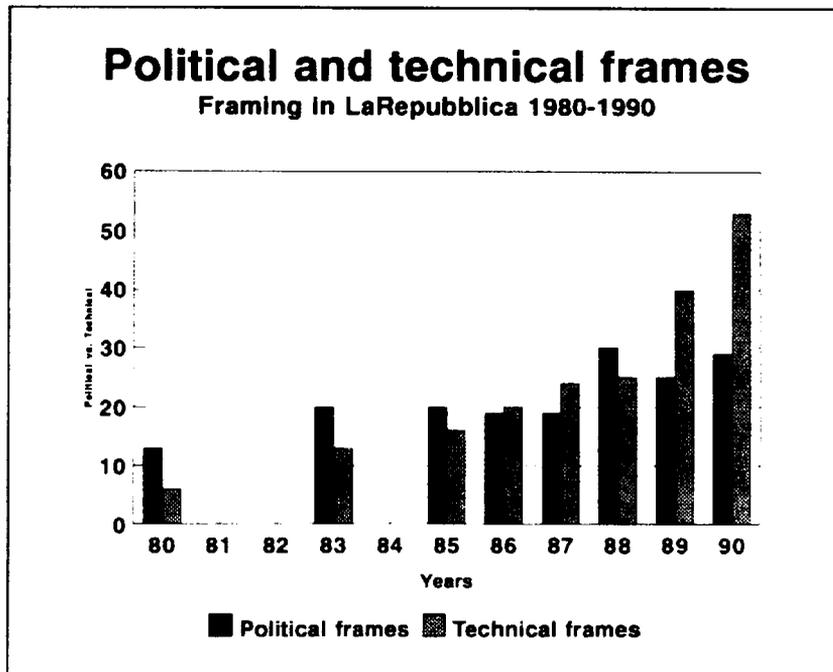


Figure 9

Regarding the Lega's campaigns and its thematization of issues it is striking that, contrary to La Repubblica, even in the years before the juridical disclosure of *tangentopoli* this new agent in Italian politics followed a path far more oriented to political conflict. Costantini (1994) has conducted a study of the Lega's publication coding a total of 453 articles over ten years (1982-92). He plotted the articles around certain themes and counted their frequency. As emerges from the results documented in table VI, the Lega put emphasis on those issues crucial for public discourse in the early 1990s. It was, next to the electoral campaigns, mainly concerns of a general economic-fiscal, social or political character that shaped the Lega's political campaigns. Interestingly for a 'regionalist' movement much less attention was given to federalism and related institutional reforms as well as to regional

affairs (the relationship between north and south is even only of marginal significance)<sup>90</sup>. Likewise racist framing, according to the mainstream interpretation of those days supposedly the defining feature of the Lega, is given up only limited space.

There is another result that is of relevance in this context, emerging from his systematic study of the Lega's publication. Counting the central frames of each article (sample of 916) Costantini evaluated the significance of two competing profiles: those frames articulating a 'political conflict' and those expressing 'social intolerance'. The results of these indices, documented in the appendix, show that the emphasis on political conflict in dealing with issues remains high throughout the years (1983-1992) and tends to gain in insignificance in the last period. Contrary to this, openly racist framing, prominent throughout

**Table VI** Central themes characterized in each unit (article) analyzed

Central Themes	Frequency	% Points
Various social problems	82	18.10
Economy and tax	80	17.66
Electoral campaign	75	18.10
Racism and immigration	45	9.93
Centralism	32	7.06
Relation North-South	30	6.62
Federalism/ instit. reform	28	6.18
Environment	23	5.08
Internal politics	18	3.97
Activity of Lega	16	3.53
'Moral question/ Corrupt.	14	3.10
Other themes	10	2.21

Source: Costantini (1994: 160)

the 1980s, sharply drops in the Lega's political discourse. From 1991 onwards it has become a negligible figure. Considering these figures it becomes clear that the main field of the Lega's campaigns has increasingly become the framing of issues along politically highly conflictualized lines resonating with and further inducing public discourse on related issues. In contrary to even the modestly critical agent of the Italian public (as expressed by La Repubblica), the Lega gave the problems in Italian society a highly controversial meaning directing the widespread dissatisfaction towards a radical opposition against the entire political establishment of the country.

In any event, the Lega was not the only political force denouncing the injustice and corruption of the Italian political system. Calls for a "moralization of public life" and "good administration" had also been repeatedly made by the left. Leftist regions are known to be

<sup>90</sup> See for a more detailed discussion and analysis of this distinct type of territorial politics represented by the Lega chapter 7.4.3.

better governed, their services are more efficient and, besides some exceptions, communist politicians have not been accused of direct political corruption. Despite these facts, the Lega and not the organizationally and culturally more powerful left has been successful in attracting the votes of a discontented public. It can be supposed that an answer to this phenomenon lies in the successful strategies of the Lega as a new political agent, as well as in the related general crisis of the left in recent years. Thanks to its ability to reinterpret what were perceived as intractable national problems in terms of an easy counterposition of North and South, the Lega achieved massive electoral gains. This ability to provide viable solutions has to be seen in the context of creating a new symbolic reference in the regional identity; this allows a reframing of the existing problems according to the interpreting scheme of the Lega.

In the remarkable difference between the Lega's emphasis on political issues and that normally found in regionalism lies the elemental reorientation of this agent's collective identity. Via a more detailed analysis of the Lega's political discourse it becomes possible to identify this critical shift in its underlying integrating feature.

### 7.4.3. The Growing Preponderance of the Lombard League: The Shift Away from an Ethnic Identity

The more and more articulate aspirations of the Lega to become the major agent of reform, if not 'revolutionary' change in Italian politics led to a substantial shift in emphasis in its political campaigns. A short study conducted on the Lega's own publications supports this thesis of a gradual shift in its political identity from ethnic and region-specific features to an image of the movement defined by a national political design over the last eight years. The articles in the regular journal of the Lega, the Lombardia Autonomista and later the Lega Nord<sup>91</sup>, were coded according to the following thematic fields:

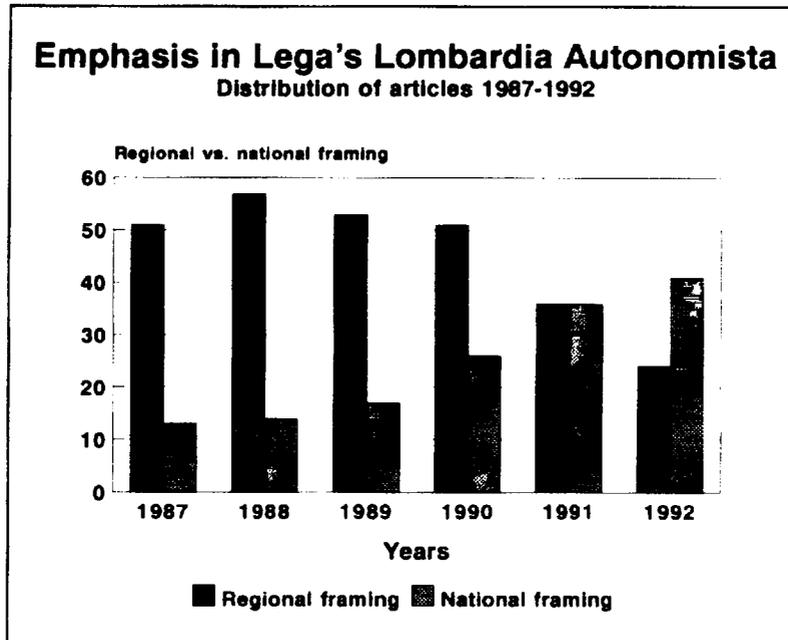
- a. Regional identity: Articles concerning the identity of the territorial defined community (language, culture, inherited past).
- b. Immigration/ 'meridionalisation' of Italy: Articles dealing with foreigners from Third-World countries (*extracomunitari*), problems caused by dominance of southern Italian mentality.

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<sup>91</sup> Bossi himself described the significance of this weekly journal thus: "This periodical was, and to certain degree is still today, the main instrument of propaganda and connection with the activists and sympathizers of the Lega." (Bossi/ Vimercati 1992: 42)

- c. Discrimination of region in the nation-state: The classical agenda of regionalist movements portraying one's own region as relegated to an inferior position in terms of political power and fiscal resources (tax load of central government, drain of resources and transfer payments).
- d. Regional politics: Concerns for problems in the region itself and for local government.
- e. Political corruption and malfunction of the political system: Articles dealing with national politics, corruption (*tangentopoli*, organized crime and the connection between the mafia and official politics).
- f. Economic problems: Mismanagement particularly in state economy, structural discrimination of small, middle-sized business.
- g. Inefficiency of public services: Waste of public resources, malfunction of most state-run services.

The first four categories (a.-d.) were taken as indicators for the traditional agenda of regionalist political forces whereas the latter three spheres of political campaigns (e.-g.) manifest the orientation towards national issues and broader political questions. Articles dealing with the supposedly inherited past of the region and its identity built on these stable patterns (a) and those referring to problems of immigration (b) are important for the enterprise of constructing social boundaries. To portray one's own region as economically exploited and politically deprived by nation-state agencies (c) and to put emphasis on regional concerns (d) is designed to politicize these feelings of belonging to a certain territory. The notion of violated rights of a culturally distinct community is the classical political framing advice of regionalist movements. The issues of political corruption (e), economic mismanagement (f) and inefficiency of public services (g), on the other hand, reflect a political discourse on a national scale. In referring to these issues the Lega is obviously competing with the interpretations of the other major parties in Italian politics.



The results of this study clearly show that in the early 1990s the emphasis in the Lega's political campaigns shifted in essence (See figure above and table 2 in appendix). In this period of its mobilization, the attention of the Lega's publications focused to a lesser extent on the classical themes of regionalist movements, i.e., the endangered cultural homogeneity and identity of the community and its political deprivation vis-à-vis the agencies of the centralized state. Instead the emphasis has shifted towards national issues. Most significant in this respect is the increase in the number of articles dealing with what has come to be known as *tangentopoli* in the early 1990s. The 'political class', its corrupt practices and its entanglement with organized crime, became the main target of the Lega's political crusades.

The transformation of the Lega from an originally regionalist force with an explicit ethnically based collective identity and related political goals to a national political force has had critical consequences for its political mobilization. Discarding its identity as a traditional regionalist force the Lega has widened the scope of its political goals and potential supporters for its protest against Rome. Initially its efforts aimed at creating a sense of 'ethnic identity' in order to make the territorial collectivity meaningful for those interests the Lega claimed to represent. The (failed) attempt to revitalize the 'Lombard' language, demonstration marches with historic costumes and folkloristic staging were the most significant elements in this respect. Gradually, the Lega's political campaigns have shifted away from this reference to

a supposedly indigenous tradition and culture in Lombardy and Veneto. It has been steadily replaced by a collective identity which rhetorically cites these 'ethnic' elements without, however, giving them any concrete political meaning. On these grounds the Lega adapted a flexible strategy to reformulate its key issues corresponding to the newly emerging opportunities in the imploding political system. By doing this, the Lega became primarily an agent of political change on a national level benefitting from the devastating results of *tangentopoli*.

Comparing a populist force such as the Lega and ethno-regionalist movements it becomes obvious that the former enjoys the advantage of being able to unite many different, even clashing interests in its political project. Traditional regionalist movements act on the basis of existing roots in historical nationalism, and aim in their political strategy at preserving the differences which sets the community apart from the national context. Populist regionalist movements, on the other hand, are not restricted to the legitimating symbols of their indigenous community nor are they dependent on the traditional regional elites. In this respect, the Lega's shift away from a ethno-regionalist approach allowed to integrate new political issues into its agenda and to substantially widen the scope of potential adherents.

#### 7.4.3.1. 'Republic of the North': Macro-regions and '*federalismo integrale*'

*La Lega è la Lega, l'unica protesta antisistema, con idee molto dure ma non si sa quanto chiare* (G. Ferrara)<sup>92</sup>

Seeking to tap new social groups as potential supporters the Lega had to modify its key political goals in accordance with the shift in its integrating collective identity. An overstated emphasis on its territorial identity and the related agenda of regional self-determination in the north by definition would have excluded large parts of the Italian population from its political project. Having originally portrayed the south as basically incompatible with the values of the north, a new political framing was needed to render any attempts of expanding beyond the traditional strongholds credible. The dividing lines of Italian society were reformulated. In the Lega's campaigns the conflict north versus south was gradually replaced by 'honest and upright' citizens versus 'corrupt politicians'. Thus, the element of territoriality, so far a critical reference point of the Lega's political mobilization,

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<sup>92</sup> Translation: "The Lega is the Lega; the only authentic anti-system protest with very radical ideas, however one does not know how clear they are." (G. Ferrara, *Corriere della Sera*, April 6, 1992).

lost to a large degree its geographical substance and primarily turned into a normative juxtaposition against the practices of the political establishment<sup>93</sup>. Such a shift in political identity allowed the Lega, firstly, in a missionary attitude to expand towards the south and, secondly, to meet most widespread accusation from the Italian public, namely to put into question the very existence of the Italian nation-state. As Bossi stated in 1992:

We from the Lega are not sure that we actually have divided Italy: Our project is federalism, not the north against the south, but north and a south together against this class of politicians and lackeys, against these parasitic practices. (Bossi in Savelli 1992:8)

In harmony with this statement the idea of an independent north or the split of the country into three 'macro-regions' was not primarily conceived as a blueprint for actual political change but as a political means of challenging the Roman-based political establishment. Still, the notion of territoriality as underlying design of its collective identity remained ambiguous. Having less and less significance for the concrete political orientation of the Lega, until today the notion of territorial belonging continued to be a critical source of identity production. This rationale was, for instance, behind the Lega's ceremony at Pontida in May 1990 where its representatives with 25.000 supporters ritually celebrated the foundation of a '*Repubblica del Nord*'.

Regardless of this repeated ritual in confirming its identity as a suppressed nation, the Lega introduced some major changes into its political orientation. Employing federalism as the integrating political idea, potentially applicable in the entire country, Bossi combines the traditional agenda of regional self-determination, first of all the integrating territorial identity, with an universalistic idea of political organization. In its campaigns the Lega presents a strict federal order as the only realistic blueprint for a juster and more democratic society, denoting a policy process closely related to the specific identity and the social conditions of the region and its citizens. In the Lega's political campaigns the idea of federalism has become the 'magic formula' for a future of Lombardy, which is portrayed as one of regional self-determination (this promise is articulated in slogans such as *federalismo e liberta*<sup>94</sup>). In his speeches Bossi repeatedly refers to the notion of a *federalismo integrale*, i.e., a form of federalism which goes beyond the mere structures of the national policy process. Federalism

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<sup>93</sup> For a discussion of the difficulties involved in such a essential shift in political identity see chapter 7.7.

<sup>94</sup> Headline of the leading article in the Lega's publication ('Organo Ufficiale della Lega Nord'): Lombardia Autonomista, Dec. 4, 1991. The main slogan at the first national congress of the Lega Nord was: 'Un nuovo stato per la libert ' ('A new state to realize freedom')

is referred to as the embracing principle with which Italy is said to meet its most urgent problems: from the economy to the policy process, from education to culture, federalism is presented as the universal cure for the malfunctions of Italian society. Formulated as a political program it proposes a far-reaching reorganization of the economic, social and cultural order according to the rule of regional self-determination. Ideologically, this proposal is framed as a strict alternative between either an authoritarian centralized state or a federalist state which is described as one responsive to the needs of the people in the region:

The federalist state is exactly the opposite of the current centralized nation-state which is the heir of the absolutism of nineteenth century nationalism. The centralized nation-state, in effect, uses its power in the economy, in the education and health system, in culture, and in every other field of human initiative in order to suppress local identity and traditions, and to suffocate any spirit of initiative; it furthermore uses this power to censor opinions and aspirations which do not coincide with the interests of the parties and of the bureaucracy which rule the national government.<sup>95</sup>

Clarifying the role of this programmatic key concept of the Lega, some theoretical considerations are helpful. For instance, Loughlin differentiates between two basic forms of federalism: a. the hamiltonian tradition and b. the integral or utopian federalists tradition. The first expression of federalist aspirations is based, in an Anglo-Saxon tradition, on the individual's need for protection of its freedom. The centralized nation-state and the state power is conceived of as a genuine threat to individual's liberty. In consonance with classical liberal thought decentralization is understood as a critical means of minimizing the coercion of the individual.

The second approach is formulated in distinct contrast to the individualist tradition, and operates with a strong notion of the community into which the single citizen is integrated. Crucial for this type of federalism is that the aspired change of the political order is much more far-reaching than the one envisioned by the Hamiltonian tradition. It opposes the 'atomization' of the individual by offering a cultural, social and political integration into the respective community. Its ideological appeal is in fact rooted in this communitarian idea of an embracing belonging of the individual to the structures of the collectivity of which it is a part. Corresponding to this strong notion of communal integration, the political aims of the latter tradition of federalism is more radical. As Loughlin states:

The integral federalists speak of a "revolution" which would radically overturn both capitalism and liberal democracy but which is radically different from the Marxist revolution based as this is on class struggle and which ignores the spiritual dimension

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<sup>95</sup> Lega Nord, *Repubblica del Nord*, Handbook of the Lega Nord in collaboration with l'Ufficio Enti Locali di Brescia, Brescia, 1991.

of human beings. This revolution is based on what they term the "federalist dialectic". This refers to the bypassing of the nation-state by a double movement or rather one movement with two aspects: "returning to the sources"; and building a federal Europe. (Loughlin 1993b:12)

Both elements are present in the Lega, a political movement that is outspokenly striving to realize a society based on the guiding principles of integral federalism. On reading carefully through the Lega's distributed political ideas and following its public campaigns it becomes apparent that the concept of *federalismo integrale* is meant to be qualitatively different from a mere institutional reform with a certain redistribution of political power on behalf of the regions. Regarding the Lega's central programmatic point the argument is that the notion of federalism formulates the ideational blueprint for a social order with radically different relationships between citizen and governing elite. Beyond a simple reform of policy structures the idea of a 'revolutionary' change in politics is evoked. As Bossi states in explaining the ideas of the Lega, federalism can be seen as an encompassing principle of reorganizing the very basis on which the individual is socially and politically integrated into the community<sup>96</sup>. In distinction to a '*dottrina contrattualista*', a contractualist doctrine with formalized procedures in the decision making process in politics, a new form of political representation is aimed at<sup>97</sup>. Thus, far from being a technical term denoting institutional change and more far-reaching for the Lega, federalism is synonymous with the call for a renewed basis for citizenship. As such the populist discourse on the alienation between 'the people' and the elites is harmonized with the encompassing ideological reference to a vague, albeit mobilizing idea of a decentralized political and administrative order.

What hence is decisive in the reference to federalism as a 'revolutionary' principle is the unspecific, but attractive, utopian message to promote the pattern of a future political order radically different from the present one. Federalism is primarily a means of symbolically challenging the country's political establishment. This reflects the theoretical argument according to which populism is primarily a form of conducting politics rather than a distinct ideology (Dubiel 1986, Pfahl-Traugher 1993). The pattern of political struggle, the protest against the 'political class' expressed by the charismatic leader Bossi, is the decisive message designed for spurring political mobilization. At the very core of the Lega's success

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<sup>96</sup> As Bossi states referring to the historic roots of federalist ideas: "Our concept of federalism as a complex philosophical, anthropological and economic system of thought is not limited to institutional solutions." (Bossi/Vimercato 1993: 146).

<sup>97</sup> As an underlying rationale of the ubiquitous reference to federalism in the Lega's campaigns the tendency towards an indistinct 'identitarian' concept of democratic reorganization becomes apparent.

lies Bossi's capacity to transform cynicism and marginalization into active political commitment. The vague reference to political goals such as federalism and free market economy in this context serves as legitimation for claims rooted in an indeterminate protest against a perceived deprivation. As Bocca accurately observes, commenting on the last meeting of the Lega at Pontida:

I understood that what counts for the Lega,..., is the 'popular pact of adulation' basically ignored by the media. ... The 'popular pact of adulation' is based on the gratefulness and fate that the followers of the Lega have for Umberto Bossi and the other leaders, which have rescued them from the sadness and anonymity of the province, from the state of political and cultural marginalization turning them into protagonists.<sup>98</sup>

The radical claims formulated by the Lega create problems when it comes to translating the call for a radically different communal integration of the citizens into a concrete scheme for political reform. A central dilemma can be identified that will be discussed in more detail in the concluding section: with the prospect of acquiring political power itself, the Lega faced the necessity of actual specifying what 'integral federalism' means in concrete political terms. It had to render plausible the link between the source of its ideological attraction, the radical protest against discredited agents of the old system in the name of territorially specified rights, and its program for political change. The radical oppositional stand, the plea for a totally different form of political representation and the pragmatic concern of how to introduce institutional change in the political system had to be organically linked. The political mobilization of the Lega has been based on the symbolic challenge of the political establishment in the name of a superior community. In contrast to the mass parties the Lega claimed to be radically visionary in terms pushing for a qualitative change in politics. In the political practice after the 1992 elections and more urgently after being part of national government, however, the emphatic call for "freedom of the Lombard people"<sup>99</sup> had to be translated into mundane pragmatic concerns for political change.

An important point for the Lega's ideology is in this context the fact that its individualistic, market approach regarding the economy is hardly compatible with the communal notion that underlies its collective identity. The market and capital tend not to be

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<sup>98</sup> Bocca, Giorgio, 'On. Bossi, il liberismo non è una pastiglia da prendere all'ora dei pasti'. In: L'Espresso, 22 April, 1994.

<sup>99</sup> Even the decision to take part in the coalition with Berlusconi was emphatically rationalized with slogans such as: "1994: the dictatorship will fall (of the old parties/ O.S.)" (in: Lega Nord, No.6, February 28, 1994) or: "Lega yes, regime no. There is a revolution to accomplish" (in: Lega Nord, No.7, March 9, 1994).

committed to a territorially defined community, so that the small shopkeepers and entrepreneurs, the decisive fraction of the Lega's electoral base, cannot have a major interest in an integral federalism that would threaten to jeopardize the access to a wider market. The dynamic of the free market as well as a supra-national integration such as the European unification tend to be the forces that undermine feelings of communal belonging and the integrative power of a political project aiming at binding its citizens politically and culturally to the community. Ideally, market relations are built on the exchange between formally equal units regulated only by the distribution of economic resources rather than on considerations of commitments to a territorial community.

This consideration throws light on an interesting aspect of the Lega's identity as a regionalist movement. Territorially based political movements often attract the indigenous population because of the idea and sentiments of fellowship and solidarity to which their protest - explicitly or implicitly - refers. In contrast to this it is striking that in the case of the Lega the binding, politicized common identity is highly individualistic in character (Bonomi 1992). It finds its crucial focus point in a shared work ethics and a notion of individual virtue. As shall be shown in the concluding part, this is one important source of the difficulties the Lega recently has had to face in sustaining its political mobilization.

#### **7.4.3.2. Organizational Modernization and Standardization: the Establishment of the 'Lega Nord'**

The significant shift in the Lega's collective identity from a regionalist, Northern based territorial movement towards a 'universalistic' force with an explicit national layout, has been accompanied by corresponding institutional and strategic changes. One critical element in this development is the gradual enlargement of the Lega's sphere of activity and success. When, by the end of the 1980s the initial success of the Lega Veneto had spread, firstly, to Lombardy and then to other regions in the North of Italy, the Lega Nord was established. The Lega Nord is formally a federation of ten regional party organizations covering Northern and Central Italy (Piemonte, Lombardia, Liguria, Veneto, Trentino-Alto-Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna, Toscana and most recently Valle d'Aosta and Umbria).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Originally in 1991 the Lega Nord was founded by the following leagues which, until then, were organizationally only loosely linked: Lega Veneta, Piemont Autonomista, Lega Lombarda as the earliest regionalist movements and the Lega Emiliano-Romagnola, the Alleanza Toscana and the Union Ligure as the 'latecomers'.

The coordination of the different leagues active in Northern Italy helped to use the available resources more efficiently. Common electoral campaigns were designed and a joint publication was produced; the Lombardia Autonomista with a more region-specific approach became the Lega Nord. This was a first step in a process designed to overcome the folkloristic image of the Lega Lombarda and to present itself as a serious political force competing on an equal scale with traditional national parties. Transcending the single leagues' approaches, step by step, an organizational apparatus was established which united the material resources as well as coordinating programmatic orientations and political campaigns. However, as shall be explained in the following section, the growing thematic and organizational diversification of the Lega was accompanied by the maintenance of the strict hierarchical structure regarding the internal decision making process.

One crucial element in sustaining the stability and legitimacy of such a highly hierarchical organization is the way in which the internal organizational communication is structured. It is, in this context, significant that there is no continual exchange between the different regional leagues within the framework of the Lega Nord except for those forms of cooperation that are mediated by the dominating core group. Succeeding the strict hierarchical order established within the Lega there are no politically relevant patterns of vertical communication between the different organizational levels. As a functionaire in Veneto stated:

To be frank, I personally do not have any contacts with our colleges of the Lega Lombarda, nor do I think that my collaborators here do have them. We all (all leghisti/ O.S.) meet once or twice a year at our congresses but other than that we just might meet occasionally in Milan.

The organizational unification was accompanied by campaigns spreading the idea of creating three macro-regions in Italy (North, Center, South) as politically independent entities with extensive legislative and executive power. This at the time crucial proposal of the Lega helped to successfully combat the accusation that they were advocating a premodern division of the country into non-viable small parts. Correspondingly this project was useful in redefining the political identity of the Lega along the lines of economic interests and cultural affinity to a territory larger than the administrative regional units. By doing so, the Lega was able to effectively refer to a diffuse idea of Northern culture rather than to a - virtually non-existent - regional identity in a narrower sense.

The next step in the organizational enlargement of the Lega was that of extending its influence beyond its traditional strongholds in Lombardy and the Veneto. Until the beginning of the 1990s the Lega claimed to be the advocate of the united Northern regions without making a serious effort to expand its sphere of influence towards the south. Its original

political goals were closely linked to the idea of self-determination of the territory it claimed to represent. Yet, with the growing electoral success and the severe crisis of the political establishment the Lega launched a campaign emphasizing the 'national character' of its political project. It is against this background that the more recent strategic move of the Lega has to be seen. In April 1993 Bossi suggested changing, at least in the South, the name of the Lega Nord to *Lega Italia Federale*<sup>101</sup>.

Accordingly, first attempts were made to launch the *Lega Sud*<sup>102</sup>. This basically only became possible with the far-reaching dismantlement of a political program based upon a strictly formulated territorial identity. At least potentially, the Lega became a realistic political option in the south, after having decided to present itself primarily as an anti-establishment force. Such a redefinition of its guiding political goals was hence accompanied by a further weakening of those boundaries originally assigning the Lombard or Northern community. This is the background against which, commenting on the nearby general elections, Bossi could announce in an openly missionary attitude that he would "save Italy"<sup>103</sup>.

### 7.4.3.3. Organizational Features Within the Lega: Charismatic Leadership

Focusing on the organizational resources and mechanisms through which the Lega has become an effective and convincing political force means to shed light on the peculiar character of the Lega as a protest movement. There is no personal and organizational continuity between the Lega and former or contemporary social movements in Italy. Moreover, the role of the organizational nucleus of some political activists is remarkable in comparison to recent social movements. Regarding the pacifist or the environmental movements it is arguable that the professional activists have offered an organizational framework for a multitude of formerly individualized forms of protest behavior. This is not to ignore the active, mobilizing role these organizations themselves have played in the context of the respective movements. Nonetheless, they were primarily formed as a response to the

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<sup>101</sup> See: L'Indipendente, 'Soffia il vento d'Europa', April, 25th. 1993. After some harsh reaction from hard core 'leghisti' Bossi modified his idea basically renouncing his plan to change the Lega's name; see: LaRepubblica, 24.4.1993 'Cambiamo nome, ma solo al sud' or 'Bossi: Il nome non si cambia' in: LaRepubblica 10.5.93.

<sup>102</sup> See: 'I lombard del polo dus', in: LaRepubblica, 11.3.92.

<sup>103</sup> Bossi in an interview for LaRepubblica 'Macché protesta, io salvverò l'Italia', 20.03.92.

need to make unstructured grass-root forms of protest more efficient and influential.

This process is somewhat reversed in the mobilization process brought about by the Lega Lombarda/ Nord. It would largely abstract from the social and political environment in which this movement has grown to speak of a political force *ex nihilo*<sup>104</sup>. Nevertheless, in the Lega the 'entrepreneurial' competence of a small circle of committed activists has been the main driving force in creating a social movement which had existed before only in a very embryonic form. Recapitulating the history of the Lega Lombarda Vimercati describes a period of 4-5 years during which this organization existed only as a highly marginalized, politically totally irrelevant political group (Vimercati 1990). Its financial, and ergo organizational capacities, were extremely restricted and dependent upon the 'idealistic' engagement of the few activists.

The first electoral successes and in particular the seat the Lega won in the national Parliament (*Camera dei Deputati*) and in the Senate (*Senato*) in 1987 helped to change this situation. With the financial entitlement resulting from this engagement in 'official' politics the Lega attained the means to professionalize its internal structure and organizational capacities. Permanent staff were employed, new offices rented and political campaigns were organized on larger scale. Moreover, the circulation of the Lega's weekly journal, the *Lega Autonomista* was increased to half a million copies<sup>105</sup>. One step in this process of professionalizing the organizational apparatus was to integrate more efficiently the groups in different cities which in the initial period had been left more or less on their own.

Describing some concrete features of the Lega's organization a more general consideration needs to be made. The internal structure of the Lega's organizational apparatus is not merely instrumental, but poses an issue critical to the Lega's political identity. As emerges from the interviews it is essential that it stands for a model of politics qualitatively different from the dominant ones represented by the established parties. For the motivation of its activists as well as for its electorate this demarcation from the traditional actors in Italian politics has been a decisive element in generating its political mobilization. Particularly for the ordinary member engaging on a local level on behalf of the Lega this element is important in facilitating to overcome the deeply rooted aversion against '*i politici*' ('the politicians'). Representing a commonly held attitude, an activist in Como said:

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<sup>104</sup> Interpretation suggested by Paul Piccone (1992).

<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, the Lega now publishes a satirical weekly: Quelli della Lega.

Before, I never even thought of joining a party. It was only when my friend G. told me about the Lega and brought me to one of their meetings that I realized that politics can be different. Until then, politics meant to me to make quick money by cheating people. Now I see that one can actually change something.<sup>106</sup>

Again, the form of politics conducted by the Lega, rather than being clearly defined by programmatic concerns, represents a key factor in generating commitment and motivation to act. How is this claim confirmed by the daily practice of this new political actor? Evidently, and this shall become clearer in a moment, radically democratic standards alive in leftist social movements such as the environmental, peace or women's movement are of no noticeable relevance for the Lega. The anti-party stand has taken a different direction to contesting forms of formalized rules and hierarchic structure. What, however, is the integrative power of the Lega's organization based on, if not on equal participation in the decision making process?

To tackle this question it proves necessary to draw a short picture of the organizational aspects of the Lega, primarily focusing on the relationship between the leading figures and the average member or activist. Within the Lega there are four organizational levels: a. the *Sezione locale/ comunale* (ca. 500); b. the *Sezione circoscrizionale* (as an intermediate organizational level between the local and the provincial level); c. the *Segreteria provinciale* (ca. 50); d. the *Segretaria nazionale* (9) that means the headquarters coordinating the activities of the Lega Nord. The latter comprises the 'federal secretary' for law proposals, a news agency, and a weekly publication (permanent staff at this federal level: ca. 40). These offices form a net of over 600 seats with which the Lega is nationally present (apparently to a lesser degree in the south). In quantitative terms, the organizational apparatus particularly on the communal and provincial level has grown enormously. Correspondingly, the membership has grown substantially - 140000 in 1992, and more than 200 000 in 1993. Compared to other Italian mass parties this, however, is still a relatively small number of members. This is primarily due to a restrictive practice<sup>107</sup> in adopting new associates that has been approved

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<sup>106</sup> To the question about which way the Lega is actually different from other parties the interviewed activist stated: "First of all we are not a party! We are different from those corrupt ones in Rome. We simply do not have politicians telling us what to do." As emerges often from the interviews it is rather by differentiating oneself from Rome, the parties, and the 'political class' than by pointing out concrete features of the own organization that the incompatibility with Roman-based politics is underlined.

<sup>107</sup> In its original statutes from 1984, confirmed in 1988 and somewhat revised in 1991, it says in article 5: "Those can take part in the Lega that share the fundamental principles of the autonomist concern, that sign its goals and follow the programme and actions of the Lega." As my interviews indicate this rule has often been adopted in a highly restrictive way constraining new members to commit themselves to invest a considerable amount of their resources for the Lega.

by the leadership of the organization for reasons that will be discussed later. One other point is worth mentioning regarding the Lega's ca. 200 fully employed functionaries: their average age is about 30 years<sup>108</sup> which is far younger than is standard in other mass parties.

Following the typical patterns of mass parties the Lega has generated occupational or group specific organizations. In this period it established its own workers' union (*Sindaco autonomo lombardo*, Sal), an association for farmers (*Associazione lavoratori agricoli*, Ala), an employer organization (*Associazione liberi imprenditori autonomisti*, Alia), a youth organization and a branch for women from the Lega and an organization for religious questions (*Consulta Cattolica*)<sup>109</sup> Following its explicit claim to reorganize the entire ensemble of societal structures according to a federalist design, any form of political representation has to include the principle of territoriality. What they are supposed to symbolically signal, beyond their still highly limited voice in the economy, is that the main interest for all occupational groups is rather shaped by the belonging to the region. Thus, the Lega has been able to reframe lines of political conflict in a socially important field. The co-existing associations for workers and business people is basically designed to incorporate important economic issues into the Lega's political discourse beyond the traditional class antagonism. Pointing to the 'exploited' resources of its own rich region, the Lega can claim to dispose of a programme designed to provide a common political platform for tackling the problem of unemployment and the economic crisis.

It is interesting that the different organizational subsections of the Lega aim at creating a strong feeling of attachment to the 'movement', but a strong social and emotional allegiance to them can not be equated with an active political participation. On the contrary, the affirmation of the shared subcultural environment is perceived as a sufficient criterion for belongingness. Being part of the territorially defined community is symbolically secured rather than confirmed by participatory rights. As Biorcio correctly observes:

For a long time the Lega has worked to construct a type of relationship with its electorate in which representation at its foremost means a specific form of subcultural belonging. Here it is established in a system which one could define as the 'belonging without participation'. The only thing that is asked from the individual actor is the acknowledgement of a fundamental belonging to the *popolo lombardo* (..) and the support for the Lega: all the rest is implicit. (Biorcio 1991:76)

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<sup>108</sup> See: U. Brindani, 'Mondo Lega', in: Panorama, December 12, 1993.

<sup>109</sup> Next to these organizations in the socio-economic sphere, the Lega set up a cultural association (*Associazione culturale leghe italiane sportive*, Aclis) providing beyond the actual facilities a social realm supportive of the Lega's political socialization (see on the role of these associations: Molioli 1991)

The internal decision-making procedures of the Lega are designed similarly. Besides the different organizational levels there is a politically relevant distinction between certain groups within the Lega indicating the institutionalized distribution of power (Tarchi 1994). On top of the strictly hierarchically organized pyramid of the movement's (party's) apparatus there is a group of founding members forming the political core of the organization that determines key issues of the Lega. The

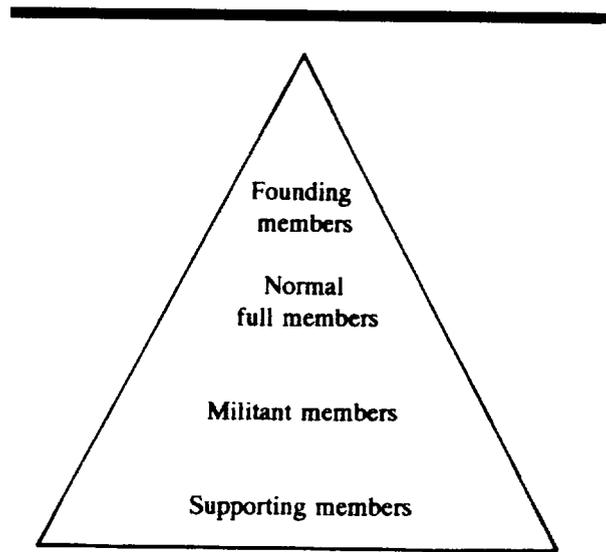


Figure: The Pyramid of Lega's Organization

members of these groups are mostly *leghisti* of the first days, constituting the circle of close collaborators around Bossi. Next in the hierarchy are the 'normal full members'. This category comprises those who are entitled to vote at the congresses of the Lega and who hence possess a certain voice within the organization. One step below there are the militant members who are actively involved in the campaigns of the Lega without, however, being recognized as full members entitled to vote beyond the local level. They are followed by supporting members with a low degree of involvement and activity within the Lega's political organization. Those who belong to this group are totally deprived of the right to vote within the Lega<sup>110</sup>.

The internal power structures are furthermore stabilized by a strict practice of recruiting new members. Stressing its dissimilarity with other parties the Lega initially selected its members according to special criteria anchored in organizational and symbolic practice of its recruitment procedure. In the early days of its political activity each person willing to join the Lega was carefully judged, examining his/her possible links with political opponents. Furthermore, each new member was obliged to commit him/her to investing a noticeable part of his spare time on a steady basis on behalf of the movement. These were organizational reasons for this - for the aimed expansion an efficient staff was needed - as this

<sup>110</sup> Corresponding to the internal hierarchy there are different forms of membership cards differentiating in the price. Normal supporters pay 60.000 Lire whereas activists pay only 25.000 and the special members 200.000 at Pontida.

routine secured a strong integration into and hence socialization through the local organizational *nuclei* of the Lega. At the same time this established a recognizable difference to traditional parties. Being part of the Lega meant being considerably involved in the political activities of the particular Lega branch. The commitment in terms of moral obligation and personal resources was to symbolize the new quality of 'citizens' politics'.

The strictly hierarchical order indicates that the internal relations are structured according to a top-down approach with a small potent group of leaders at the top and a constituent, following and executing the political guidelines formulated 'above'. The presumably democratic pronouncement that political power will be brought back to 'normal' people in the north is countered by the concrete and actual political practice of this new force in Italian politics. Far from sharing the democratic ideals of former social movements, the Lega is characterized by a hierarchical internal structure with a charismatic leader at the top. U. Bossi uses his leadership in an authoritarian way, which has already provoked several cases of (failed) 'palace coups' (Regarding the Lega, Vimercati speaks of a 'Leninist organization'; Vimercati, 1990: 82). One illustration of how the decision making-process is carried out within the Lega is the above-mentioned fact that at the first national conference of the Lega Lombarda in 1989, the voting power was restricted by decree to a core group of founding members of the Lega (Later Bossi and his collaborators were successful in transmitting this organizational model to the Lega Nord).

Tacchi argues that one can legitimately speak of a '*modello dell'obbedienza*' (model based on obedience) regarding the organizational features of the Lega. Unlike cadre parties of an old communist type the Lega is, however, internally structured by qualitatively different mechanisms of compliance. The Lega does not dispose of a net of interwoven organizational levels, all designed to perfectly implement the leader's guidelines. In contrast to many such communist party organizations, in the Lega there is a structural lack of a functional network securing members' obedience. An emblematic expression of this is the fact that Bossi still insists on deciding all inter-organizational issues and quarrels personally<sup>111</sup>. From changing the Lega's main political and strategic objectives to its organizational development and the recruitment of new leading figures, almost everything is decided personally by Bossi. At least until its participation in national government there has been no reliable organizational

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<sup>111</sup> Bossi explicitly states: "The Lega is me. The Lega is a giant machine that is moved by me, not by others. Its politics is determined by me, at least until the next congress." Bossi in: Battistini, 'Senza di noi, sarebbe guerra civile', *La Repubblica*, 18.3.93.

structure, coherently linking the small circle of leading representatives with the differentiated bodies of the Lega. Particularly on the upper level roles are still not clearly defined and institutional bodies such as the Lega's associations for different social groups are often not rationally linked to the entire organizational framework of the Lega<sup>112</sup>.

It is hence most appropriate to describe the Lega as an organization integrated by charismatic leadership. This means that the complete decision-making process is directed towards and rooted in the faith in a superior personality. On the part of the activists there is a direct commitment to Bossi, even if at the same time he is remote from the mundane work of daily politics on a communal level and, to certain extent, equally from the Roman policy process. Amongst the activists *Il senatur* (name consigned to Bossi with his first Roman mandate) has been an uncontested reference point in their ideological orientation and motivation for their political engagement although at the same time being beyond the range of common political task. Being an omnipresent authority he is not conceived of as being part of the procedures and organization that constitute the normal life of the Lega's organizational body. Applying the Weberian notion of charismatic leadership to the formation of party organizations, Maraffi accurately states:

...charismatic leadership implies the existence of a leader who by himself and on his own (not, as is usual, together with others) carries out all the crucial tasks of establishing the organization, articulating its goals, selecting its social base, etc. In such an organization the leader becomes for the party members the sole interpreter of the party doctrine and, at the same time, the sole person able to actualize it. Charismatic leadership is also what gives the party goals their basic unity and its members a sense of purpose. (Maraffi 1994:6)<sup>113</sup>

It is, however, worth emphasizing that the internal discussions concerning these questions are shaped by very particular legitimating discourse which is partly responsible for the fact that until very recently no major opposition against the authoritarian organizational principles had been formulated. The potential contradiction between the Lega's political claims centered on decentralization and local empowerment and its actual internal practice has

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<sup>112</sup> It is indeed one of the crucial merits of a charismatic figure at the top to combine an effective form of leadership with an unspecified and organizationally indistinct power base. Bossi's power base rests on an almost unlimited belief in the abilities of the Lega's leader. In this context a functionaire of the Lega in Varese said: "Whatever Bossi decides, we carry out. The success of our movement shows that Bossi is far more intelligent than any of these politicians in Rome. Even if it is sometimes hard to understand what Bossi is after, ultimately he gets what he wants. You will see..."

<sup>113</sup> See on this Weberian category of charismatic leadership in interpreting the Lega also: Constantini (1994: 128-130).

rarely been thematized by its activists and supporters<sup>114</sup>. Being diverse from other parties means to Lega activists that their engagement is based on a strict canon of ethic values. Those interviewed used often the word "honesty" or "integrity" to define themselves in antagonism to the old party system and professional politicians as their main representatives. It is in the name of these values that severe restrictions are applied on those seeking membership. One way in which compliance to the rules is said to be achieved is the strict hierarchical and stationary internal order of the organization. To become influential within the Lega at the present stage of its development is almost impossible. At least it would take a long time for newcomers to place themselves in a leading position<sup>115</sup>. It is not only that institutional rules prevent major changes amongst the more influential representatives of the Lega, but that the appointment of new leading figures is directly controlled by Bossi and his tactical decisions. Again, the power of a charismatic leader is based on his being detached from any binding rule formulated to regulate internal power structures of this organization.

In functional terms the organizational features of the Lega can thus be described to be productive in two respects: firstly, they allow a leading core group, until recently highly loyal to Bossi, to control and redefine the political orientation of the Lega. The structural lack of control of the leaders means that decisions can be taken quickly and, according to political aspirations, formulated autonomously by the core group. Secondly, there is no problem in imposing decisions, taken at the top, on the base.

It is with reference to these advantages of a top-down approach that the charismatic leader himself justifies the lack of internal democratic procedures. He points to the inherent fragility of a new political actor such as the Lega and the need to protect it from 'destructing' forces when defending the authoritarian form of leadership. At the first national congress of the Lega Lombarda on the December 7, 1989 Bossi justifies his '*linea egemonica*' (hegemonic manner) by pointing to the "systematic attempts to subvert" the project of the Lega. He argues that a strictly hierarchical order with clear power structures is indispensable to resist the outer political and economical pressure. As Bossi formulates his concern in a

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<sup>114</sup> In contrast to the Lega's supporters, the opinion of the Italian public is very outspoken: A survey conducted by the Institute Cirm amongst 820 nationally sampled people showed that 75% consider the Lega to be 'authoritarian' and only 25% 'democratic'. One third of the persons interviewed compared Bossi explicitly with Mussolini (see: Panorama October 10, 1993)

<sup>115</sup> In the articles of the Lega's Statutes there are explicit rules about how long one has to be member to obtain responsibility at the different organizational levels. For instance, for the communal context it takes six months, two years on a provincial level and three years on a regional level to become a politically influential figure within the Lega.

question to his followers: "Do you have the strength to say no to the money, to the temptation of the joy of power?" (Vimercati 1990:83). According to Bossi it is a 'Roman conspiracy', hiding behind internal opposition as well as behind assaults from outside that makes it necessary to govern the Lega with 'an iron hand'<sup>116</sup>.

Interesting in his justification, besides the mere tactical considerations, is that Bossi attempts to turn his apology of the authoritarian internal rules into a piece of evidence of the Lega's difference from 'normal parties'. At the congress Bossi hints at the threat of the Lega turning into a "a party like all the others, following the traditional game with normal internal rules and the substantial transformation towards corrupt practices."<sup>117</sup> It is in distinction from the routinized game of inner party power struggles that Bossi defines the Lega as a 'movement'. As an underlying idea there is the implicit notion that an immediate correspondence between the political organization and its leader, approved in a symbolic plebiscite<sup>118</sup>, is a superior way of representation to the one practiced in traditional mass parties. Procedural aspects of the democratic participation of the party members are said to be secondary, whereas the moral integrity of the leader is pointed to as the decisive element in uniting the movement and in determining its political fate. A notion of an 'identitarian concept' of democratic representation tends to replace the concern for formalized forms of participation in the organizational decision-making process. With this reference to the image of a natural empathy between leader and adherents Bossi apparently seeks to encounter the threat endemic to movements. This is the problem of how to maintain the belief in a common political project built on a common concern and direct motivation rather than organizational belonging under the impression of increasingly formalized relations within the SMO. With his charismatic model of leadership Bossi attempts to emphasize the supposedly still dominant spontaneity of political engagement of *i leghisti*. Along these lines Bossi seeks to give legitimacy to his role as uncontested head of the Lega by hinting at his personal aspirations which coincide with the interests of the collectivity he represents. "The people know that I am the first one to start work, to plaster the posters, to give to the movement the money I earn; for this they act like me." (Bossi & Vimercato 1993:96-97)

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<sup>116</sup> This claim is often reflected in the statements from the interviewed Lega activists. One said: "The Lega is hierarchical, I know, but this is its strength. How many different people do we have within the Lega, how many who wants to impose their particular will on our movement. What is decisive is to fight for our common interest and Bossi understands how to defend our communal concern."

<sup>117</sup> Bossi cited in Bossi/ Vimercati 1993: 95.

<sup>118</sup> This kind of direct affirmation by the *popolo leghista*, for instance, is celebrated every year at Pontida. Per acclamation Bossi asks for the approval of his political proposals.

These claims are similarly reflected in the attitude of at least the vast majority of the Lega's members. It is the charismatic leader Bossi who has so far guaranteed the integrative power of the organizational body of the Lega composed of highly diverse social and political groups. Interestingly, and manifestly particular for forms of charismatic leadership, is the element that followers have an *a-priori* faith in the leader's capacity. The complete identification of the charismatic leader and the political movement by Lega activists is often perceived not as a democratic deficit but as a virtue. As emerges from interviews conducted, for a notable number of the Lega's activists Bossi is a kind of profane messiah enlightening the dark with which politics has been associated (Tarchi 1994)<sup>119</sup>. The charismatic leader is said to have a superior capacity in judging political situations and taking decisions. The young activist from Bergamo is no exception when he says:

I know it must seem to you as if Bossi changes his mind every day. But I am convinced that he is aware of what he is doing and that he has a clear plan about what he wants. Even if I personally do not understand some of Bossi's 'moves', so far it has always turned out that he was right in the end. He knows best how to fight the old parties. As long as he leads us, we will be successful.

The organizational framework of the Lega is manifestly characterized by a very particular coexistence of two seemingly contradictory mechanisms. On the one hand, the organizational apparatus of the Lega is increasingly complex and functionally structured in such a way as to meet the requirements of a political actor active on all administrative and geographical levels. It shows a relatively high degree of internal differentiation. On the other hand, the decision-making process within this organization is shaped by features which one typically finds in small social groups integrated by immediate contacts between its group members. The decision-making process in the Lega is determined by a core group of activist all more or less loyal to their charismatic leader Bossi. It is worth investigating how this organization is able to combine the monolithic power structure with the need to set up a differentiated network of at least partly independent sections.

Recent quarrels within the Lega Lombarda are a typical sign of the difficulties which necessarily result if one organization or even one person claims leadership in a social

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<sup>119</sup> It has been reported more than once by Lega activists that the first personal contact with Bossi (some point to a media-based experience) had a quasi magic impact on them, showing them the right way for their political engagement and furnishing them with strong incentives to invest in their engagement on behalf of the Lega. In this context another episode is revealing. In northern Italy a graffiti was often found saying: "*Bossi salvaci!*" (Bossi, save us).

movement<sup>120</sup>. Similar to other new movements, organizational structures are not formalized, but the anti-authoritarian principles stressed by recent social movements are defeated in the Lega by a reliance on the charisma of its leader, Umberto Bossi. This behavior has provoked several short-lived splinter groups, but it has contributed to the creation of relative cohesion at a critical time. Until very recently forms internal opposition against Bossi ended with the dismissal of the dissidents, the most prominent being the former president of the Lega, Lombarda E. Castellazzi<sup>121</sup>. Neither he, nor any other splinter groups from the Lega, have been able to build up an organization attracting any notable support from Lega sympathizers. The irresistible rise of the Lega until 1994 and Bossi's basically uncontested leadership frustrated any attempt to set up a lasting competition to the leagues<sup>122</sup>.

Manifestly the success of the Lega and its involvement in complex administrative tasks poses an organizational and legitimating challenge to the Lega's internal structure based on direct guidance by Bossi. The rise of a more and more important group of leading figures within the organization taking political responsibility even on a ministerial level has to be made compatible with Bossi's monopoly to guide the Lega. What has thus lately emerged at the top level of the Lega's organization is a kind of job sharing. Bossi still possesses the omnipotent power to determine the political orientation of the Lega by arbitrarily changing positions and allies. Next to him, and growingly important, there is a group of politicians with distinct managerial capacities. The four ministers in Berlusconi's cabinet, Formentini (the present mayor of Milan), Speroni, Rocchetta Maroni, and I. Pivetti, the head of the parliament, are the most well-known examples of an expertise needed to take advantage of the political responsibility that has now become feasible to the Lega. It is worth noticing here that these representatives of the Lega are still deliberately insignificant in political terms when it comes to determining the fate of the Lega (The Minister of the Interior, Maroni, is about

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<sup>120</sup> Similarly to other new movements in the Lega there is a debate on organizational forms. For instance, in the winter of 1991 city councilors pointed to contrasts in different organizational models as reasons for defections. While Bossi prefers a loosely structured organization, which is typical of new social movements such as ecologism, others would welcome more "internal organization." (See: 'Continua la grande fuga dalla Lega Lombarda', *La Repubblica*, November 23 n.5). These controversies refer to the very essence of the Lega's political project: whether it should become that of a party or remain a social movement. Still, until very recently these debates did not go so far to question the uncontested leadership of Bossi.

<sup>121</sup> He was fired by Bossi in 1991 after being accused of promoting the, at this time, inopportune cooperation with 'regime' parties.

<sup>122</sup> Miglio's and Rocchetta's leaving the Lega might indicate a new qualitative step in this context; see on this point the discussion in the concluding sections.

to become the first exception to this rule; his influence in national government has equipped him with a power base increasingly important for the internal processes of the Lega as well). Bossi's attempt to perpetuate his charismatic leadership is built on this co-existence of his uncontested potency and the managerial competence of those who are occupied with the assignment in daily politics. He himself is consciously detached from the mundane task of daily administrative work in government. In the long run, as the Lega's political identity becomes more closely linked to actual performance in government, this might seriously challenge Bossi's superior position as charismatic leader.

#### 7.4.4. The Changing Profile of the Lega's Sympathizers

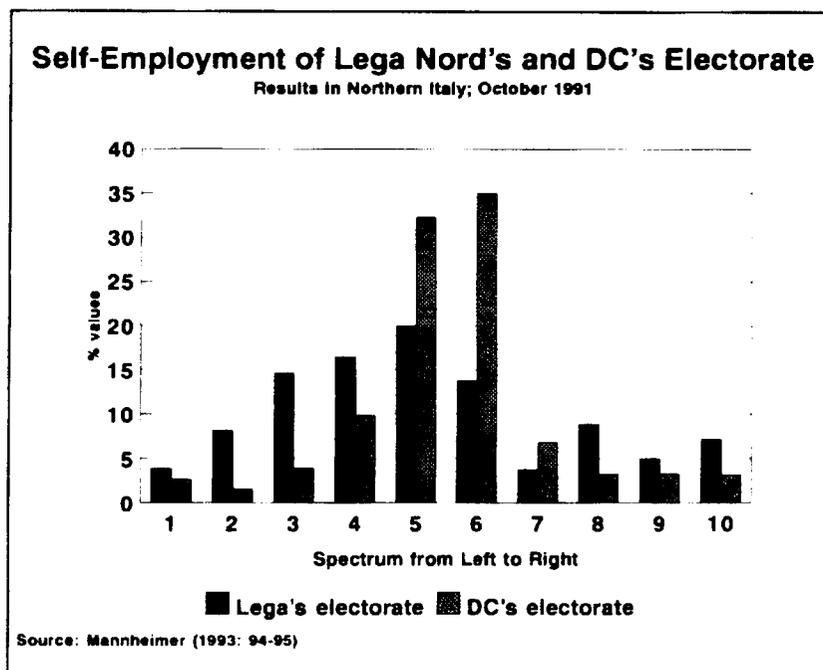
In assessing the political background of the voters of the regionalist force, one has to be aware of the obvious fact that the Lega is strong in the 'white', DC dominated northern part of the country. Consequently, the Lega recruits most of its voters from the group which traditionally voted for the Christian Democrats. However, recent studies have shown that it is not only the DC which loses its voters to the Lega. Although the conservative party that has been governing for almost four decades in Italy has still been hit the hardest by the rise of the Lega, it would seem that the electorate of the Lega is more 'colorfully' composed of former supporters of various parties. According to a recent study, voters for the Lega Nord come from the three main parties (DC 24.5%, PCI-PDS 18.9%, PSI 11.2%) as well as from smaller ones such as the PRI (5.9%) and the fascist MSI (7.7%)<sup>123</sup>.

Regarding the social-structural characteristics of the Lega's constituency there has been a gradual assimilation to the features of the other parties. Although the Lega still presents to a strong degree small crafts- and businessmen from non-metropolitan northern Italy, its electorate has widened in this respect. With its own unions, Bossi's organization has attracted certain groups from the working class environment, as it has become more and more acceptable to broader sections of the upper middle class. Likewise, people with higher

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<sup>123</sup> Study of 'Doxa', published in *La Repubblica*, p.11 (see appendix). The *Cattaneo* at the *Istituto superiore di sociologia di Milano* presents a slightly different picture. According to their data, the DC which loses most votes to the Lega (ibid.). Regarding the flow of votes from the general elections in 1992 to the ones held in 1994, in the north the Lega won from those parties that were hit the hardest by *tangentopoli*, i.e., the DC-PPI (5.6%) and the PSI (4.4%).

education no longer as repulsive as in the past to vote for the Lega<sup>124</sup>. Correspondingly, the age structure of its supporters shows no longer as distinct differences from the overall average as before. Rather than representing a particular social or generational group, the Lega's supporters are characterized by specific political attitudes. The primary feature in this respect is a thorough mistrust in Roman-based government and professional politicians. In comparison to the electorate of other parties Lega supporters show a distinctive estrangement from official politics.



In this context it is interesting to look at the political self-classification of the Lega's electorate. Evidently, the political protest based on a territorial identity is not simply classifiable in terms of left-right spectrum. As documented in the figure below, in situating themselves on the left-right spectrum in their majority Lega supporters tend to adopt positions labeled as 'center'. However, compared to DC voters the self-employment in terms of left-right is far more spread out and less clearly clustered in the middle. The critical attitude towards the 'political establishment' is manifestly considered to be undetermined by the categories employed in the left-right spectrum.

<sup>124</sup> In analyzing the vote for Formentini as the mayor of Milan, R. Mannheim pointed to the fact that educational background of the Lega supporters is remarkably higher than before and that the particularly independent businessmen and civil servants build a new relevant nucleus of the Lega's electorate (See: *L'Espresso*, No.27, June 1993)

Regarding the crucial feature of the territorial identity a development in the related attitude of the Lega supporters is remarkable. As the table below shows the regionally framed territorial identity is not significantly stronger amongst supporters of the Lega Lombarda/Nord than amongst all other voters (Even if the attachment to the Italian nation-state is remarkably weaker). Although one could assume that the engagement of an originally 'regionalist' force such as the Lega would initiate socio-psychological processes strengthening such an identity, the results indicate that that it is not the case. The affinity to the region or the province is not remarkably stronger amongst Lega supporters than amongst the average Italian population. In harmony with the broadened image of the Lega's collective identity the reference to the 'north' can be distinguish as a more significant reference point of identification. As emerges from the survey documented in the table below, it is the affinity to a northern value community that replace the bonds to the Italian nation-state. Both values negatively correlate with each other. It is in this respect that the Lega's constituency significantly differs from the result of the electorates of all other parties.

With respect to the affinity to a territorial entity the differences amongst the supporters from the different leagues is striking. The constituency of the Liga Veneta evidently most strongly is opposed to features of belonging to the Italian nation-state and most likely inclined to refer to the north in its identifying discourse. Not by accident it is in Veneto where the ethnic framing has persisted as an important component of the collective identity that the affinity to the sub-national territorial entity is the strongest. Correspondingly, the detachment from the south is most definite in Veneto whereas amongst the wider supporters of the Lega these anti-southern feelings are no stronger than for the average member of the Northern Italian population. The supporters of the Lega Lombarda indeed show exactly the same degree of distance to the south as the followers of the other parties.

**Table III: Affinity with and distance from territorial entities (in Percentage)**

Feel close affinity with:	All	Close to Lega Nord	Close to Lega Lom.	Close to Lega Ven.
Commune	21	18	20	16
Province/ Region	24	28	29	27
Nord	9	22	15	30
Italy	23	9	13	3
Europe - World	12	23	23	23
Feel very distant from:				
South	27	35	27	45

Source: Mannheimer 1993

These figures confirm the shift in the Lega's collective identity from an ethnically framed image towards one that is predominantly shaped by non-territorial features of cultural values. The belligerent demarcation from the south and the repulsion of the Italian nation-state no longer play the critical role once attributed to it in an earlier stage of its mobilization. In its most mature stage, represented by Bossi's Lega Lombarda, the affinity to the sub-national territory is no more the primary feature of the Lega's political discourse. In harmony with its declared aim to become a national political force these features have been replaced by other notions referring to which the boundaries of the collective identity are reproduced. A good illustration of this substantial shift in the constitutive elements of the integrative collective identity is the dynamic in the racist framing which had been a latent feature in the Lega's mobilization of the first years.

#### 7.4.5. Changing Patterns in Racist Framing: Redefining the Role of the 'Enemy'

As elaborated in the theoretical part, images of collective identity are characterized by a binary code by which mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion are legitimized. The demarcation from the 'other' is the constitutive element on the basis of which a sense of the 'We' is generated<sup>125</sup>. This symbolic process of boundary construction constitutively patterns the political discourse of the Lega. F. Todesco presents in his systematic study of the Lega's electoral campaigns (1992) that the political framing of the Lega is essentially shaped by the reference to an enemy that is vigorously attacked in different political domains<sup>126</sup>. Anti-southern and anti-immigrant feelings were an integral part of the Lega's effort to furnish a territorially conceived identity in its formative stage. Being labeled by large parts of the Italian public as crude racists on these grounds, members of the Lega themselves, however, vigorously reject accusations of racism. Repeatedly its representatives claim in public that the Lega does not have anything against immigrants as such. Particularly after its first electorate successes, the Lega sought to shift the emphasis of its political campaign from attacking foreigners and Italians from the *Mezzogiorno* to the agenda of federalism and regional self-determination. As Bossi pointed out in an interview: what the Lega is really against is "the state, authoritarianism, and the dominance of the centers of power. Therefore we cannot be racist."<sup>127</sup>

Rather than accepting the self-assessment of the Lega, a brief clarification is needed to go beyond an arbitrary understanding of the concept of racism. As a starting point the most appropriate definition of racism seems to be one which does not concentrate on 'essentialist' conceptions of biological differences but which has its focal point on the social process by which social collectivities are categorized and attributed with stereotypes in order to justify

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<sup>125</sup> In particular in industrialized societies where the exposure to influences from outside the home community is comparatively strong, the criteria for identification and differentiation are generated by the demarcation from the 'foreigner', by the "recognition of liminality". See for a discussion of political identity from a psychological point of view Norton (1988), especially Chapter II: 'Liminality, Identity and Difference', p.51ff. Hall speaks in this context of the 'binary separation' which is at work at the core of any racist practice (1989:919ff.).

<sup>126</sup> Out of a total of 43 posters used for political campaigns 35 show a distinct reference to an 'enemy' (see: Todesco 1992: 287ff.). These adversaries are almost always named; the following list gives an impression which are the agents from which the Lega demarcates itself and how often they are identified in the Lega's manifestations: "parties (16), mafia (15), thieves (12), Rom (9), state (centralized) (9), south (6), taxes (2), politics (2), Parliament, bureaucracy, political regime, fascism, clandestine immigration, government, *tricolore* (all 1)".

<sup>127</sup> 'Ora si. Vogliamo il Governo', interview with Fiamma Nirenstein, in: L'Indipendente, Dec., 6., 1991, p.3.

inequalities<sup>128</sup>. Miles points out that more recent conceptualizations of racism tend to look primarily at the discursive practices by which the idea of biologically and culturally different groups is constructed, constantly reproduced and used to legitimate an exclusatory political praxis (Miles 1989:62). Along these lines racism as an ideology as well as in its institutionalized form can be understood as strategies for excluding social groups from cultural or material resources on the basis of socially attributed qualities of these collectivities<sup>129</sup>. To justify these mechanisms of exclusion a strong sense of collective identity is indispensable.

The easiest way to strengthen the feeling of a (regional) collective identity and to convince people to become active on behalf of the 'threatened' world they are living in, is to draw an alarming picture of the 'enemy'. The symbolic violence of the nationalist discourse is first constituted through the aggressive attitude towards any force allegedly hostile to the community. According to C. Schmitt the notion of an external *Feind* (enemy) is essential the formation of an internal homogeneity in a social community and thus is the precondition for the political existence (and survival) of this social entity. In this regard the construction of boundaries can be described as the crucial element for the generation of a unifying collective identity and production of a legitimating basis for a collective actor in politics<sup>130</sup>.

What is at issue regarding the Lega as a territorial movement is the connection between its search for a territorial (regional) identity and the racist discourse potentially endemic to it. For investigating this issue more detailed attention needs to be given to how the binary code was constructed in the case of the Lega. In this respect it is crucial to see that in this process newly created collective identities - even if they are intentionally designed to confront existing power structures in the name of emancipatory claims (regional self-determination) - tend to be based on the latent idea of a superiority of the home community. It is evident how here the ground is prepared for the potential for more openly racist orientations is layed. As Mattelhart states:

One of the paradoxes of projects linked to the development of new forms of resistance is that they can graft on to their real desire for change the most hackneyed nationalism or even racism. Cultural identity is one of the most notable channels for this

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<sup>128</sup> See for this: Miles (1987:26-27), Van Dijk (1987:73).

<sup>129</sup> See for such a conception of racism: Hall (1980, 1989), Miles (1989).

<sup>130</sup> According to Barth the boundaries which are described as indicating the borderline between the 'we' and the 'us' are the crucial factor in creating a strong (and politically exploitable) sense of collective identity. Consequently he says: "The critical focus of investigation is the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses." (Barth, 1969:15)

ambiguity, and easily slips into a nationalist affirmation of the superiority of one group over the other. (Mattelhart et al. 1984:110)

If one turns to the concrete attitude of the Lega vis-à-vis foreign immigrants and southern Italians this ambiguity becomes striking. In the symbolic strategy that the Lega utilizes in order to build up its underlying legitimacy, it follows the main rules of an effective and politically profitable publicity campaign: it gives easy and suggestive answers to complicated political facts. In doing so, the Lega refers not so much to structural patterns of an unjust relation between the north and the south, but rather it effectively personifies the 'evil' which the nation-state or foreigners are accused of bringing to Lombardy<sup>131</sup>. Furthermore the Lega's activists constantly refer to an interpretative model in which the state conflict with the region and the alternative which the political (or geographic) entities offer to their citizens becomes obvious.<sup>132</sup>

The issue of immigration illustrates the ambiguity of a movement such as the Lega that seeks to link a binding territorially defined collective identity with a strong notion of individual virtue. The position of the Lega on this question can be exemplified concerning the attempt of the former Minister of the Interior to change the law on immigration in 1990 (the so called '*legge Martelli*')<sup>133</sup>. The ethnocentric dimension of the Lega rhetoric was discretely packaged along the following lines: In its official discourse immigrants have been mainly portrayed by the Lega as potential competitors for scarce jobs and public resources

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<sup>131</sup> It is in this respect that the Lega's political engagement can be described as highly symbolical in character. The same mechanism is at work which Edelman described as follows: "In place of a complicated empirical world, men hold to a relatively few, simple, archetypical myths, of which the conspirational enemy and the omnipotent hero-savior are the central ones. In consequence, people feel assured by guidance, certainty, and trust rather than paralyzed by threat, bewilderment, and unwanted personal responsibility for making judgements." (Edelman, 1971:83).

<sup>132</sup> One example of this is the aforementioned Lega's campaign for less taxes on fuel. In Val d'Aosta the local population (due to its status as an autonomous region) has to pay much less for fuel in comparison to other Italians; the Lega interprets this as a sign of overtaxation, accusing the state of 'plundering' the region. In this argument the fact that all over Europe the taxation of fuel is one important way of raising taxes or the question of how a dispensation from these taxes should be financed does not play a role.

<sup>133</sup> This law was designed to be a response to the problematic social situation of immigrants and the question of how to effectively control the illegal entry of a labor force from outside. The Lega accused Martelli, the socialist Italian Minister of the Interior at this time, of not facing up to the urgent problems created by continual immigration with his propositions. The Lega suggested instead a far more radical regulation of immigration, namely, to allow entry to Italy only to those who already have accommodation and a job in the region to which they intend to go. See on the issue of immigration the following articles in Lega Lombardia Autonomista or Lega Nord: 'Colpo di stato. L'immigrazione del terzo mondo minaccia la democrazia' (No.6, April 1990) and 'La legge Martelli garantisce solo la partitocrazia di Roma' (No.26, 18.7.1990).

rather than being treated with hostility because of their 'otherness'<sup>134</sup>. The Lega has argued that jobs and accommodation are necessary endowments of full members of the (Lombard) community and that hence a facilitated immigration in times of rare employment would induce social discontent and disintegration. The supposed impossibility of supplying the immigrants with a job and accommodation were described by the Lega as a reason for further restriction on the 'settlement of foreigners'. Hence, the boundaries of the Lombard or Northern community are in principle crossable; the "entrebillet" can be obtained by obeying to the rules supposedly binding in these communities. Theoretically at least, the boundaries of the Lombard community retain a potential porousness. The racist element in the Lega's campaigns can thus be described not so much in terms of an intolerance towards everything which is (phenotypically) different, but with respect to the standards taken from the world of work. The Lega's position, in harmony with its highly individualistic market type ideology, is thus not an arbitrary complement but a significant element in the newly merged collective identity framed around socio-economic lines. The potential integration into the 'community of producers' marks the criteria on which "belongingness" to the community is judged.

On the other hand, however, the discrimination against foreigners finds its rationale and legitimacy in a mostly implicit notion of ethnic or cultural homogeneity supposedly to be found in the Lombard or Northern community. Particularly in its formative years, the Lega has benefited from its campaigns portraying immigrants as the main threat to the integrative force of the own society. Mainly immigration from Third-World countries was portrayed as a threat to the community's cultural authenticity. As Bossi stated, "the cultural difference is just too great. The difference in skin color is determinantal to social peace. Imagine if your street, your public square, was full of people of color, you would no longer feel part of your own world."<sup>135</sup> This is a notion clearly beyond any aspects of individual merit. Although the Lega has sought to downplay its racist attacks on immigrants and southern Italians, the creation of an outside enemy in order to strengthen its own collective identity has been an integral part of its political success.

For instance, the cartoon below addresses feelings of suspicion towards foreigners which obviously clash with the universalistic principle according to which human beings are

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<sup>134</sup> This does not exclude in any way that open racist attacks by Lega activists are possible.

<sup>135</sup> Bossi in an interview in *Epoca*, 20 May, 1990, p.12-13. In this context Guido Bolla, the former spokesman of the Lega in Lombardy, stated: "Our campaign is, in effect, a bit racist, but not against a 'race'; rather it is against those that take advantage of us. First come the milanesi, second come the lombardi, third come the Italians, and then come all the others." (cited in Leonardi/ Kovacs 1993:59)

treated equally. The many factors which threaten to 'disgregare', i.e., to break down local society are, according to the cartoon, represented by one major phenomenon, namely, the immigration of people from outside the northern European world. The notion of the 'Non-We' are easy to blame for any form of alienation and political disorder and this hence becomes a resource in mobilization. Regarding the socio-psychological dynamic, the Lega's campaigns against an 'uncontrolled' immigration found a common denominator for the northern leagues which specified in a socially effective way the boundaries of the assigned community. In this respect racist attacks were common to the Lega's mobilization. As Woods observes:

By cleverly linking Third World immigration to the inability of the party system to maintain political order and Italian identity, regionalist movements have outmaneuvered even the neo-fascist MSI on the immigration issue. (Woods 1992: 194)

One other aspect makes this picture interesting in terms of shedding light on the underlying populist simplification and racist elements in the Lega's political propaganda. It suggests that there is something like a fusion between the two forces supposedly responsible for the problems of the region: the '*stato centralista*' (the centralized nation-state), on the one hand, and the immigrants who are 'invited' by state agencies to penetrate the Lombard community, on the other.

It is worth pointing out another interesting element in the Lega's ideological stand which is only indirectly linked to the racist aspect. The two main enemies defined and attacked by the regionalist movement are socially located at the two ends of the contemporary power structure in Italy. On one side, there is the political establishment in Rome, the *partiti Romani* and the main institutions (namely the press and big industry) that are described as controlling the centralized state agencies. They are vigorously attacked as the main agents of



Figure 12 Poster of the Lega used until 1991

the delegitimated First Republic<sup>136</sup>. On the other side, the Lega's campaigns are directed against foreign immigrants and workers from the *Mezzogiorno*, the weakest group in society which is largely deprived of any significant political influence. An anti-elitist approach hence effectively coexists with latent chauvinist feelings of superiority vis-à-vis the most deprived social group.

Corresponding to the cartoon above and its political 'message', Balbo and Manconi speak of the two faces of the Lega; according to them, the Lega represents, on the one hand, a rational protest against the excessive tax burden and against the highly deficient policy of the public household and, on the other hand, an organization with a racist and 'anti-south' ideology (Balbo & Manconi 1990:87). The second stand of the Lega, its racist elements, is for them far from accidental and is identified as the very formula of the Lega's success. Their analysis suggests that in creating the collective identity of a regional movement the Lega substantially depended (and is depending) on defining the 'we' by referring to an enemy from outside. Since a historically grown feeling of community did not exist in Lombardy until recently, a political movement that claims to be the advocate of this regional entity had to set in motion a process of *auto-valuation* ('self-identification'). Particularly in its initial phase, the Lega's strategy was characterized by an intolerance towards everyone from outside in order to build up an - ideologically exploitable - homogeneity in the 'Lombard community'.

Accordingly, the Lega has framed immigration as a severe problem for Italian society. In leaflets and articles in the weekly *Lombardia Autonomista* immigrants are constantly referred to in the context of issues such as drugs, violence, social grievances (housing and sanitary conditions), unemployment and socially parasitic practices. They are portrayed as 'trouble-makers' who cannot or will not integrate into the local community. As a study among supporters of the Lega indicates, this rejection of foreigners is thus essentially motivated by prejudice against them and stereotypes concerning their cultural habits<sup>137</sup>. In its attitude towards the question of immigration the Lega is very close to what Van Dijk describes as follows:

Immigration is not seen as a normal or natural phenomenon, or as a right of passport holders or dependents to enter the country. Rather, it is constructed as a permanent threat, as a conflict between us and them, between those who want to get in and do

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<sup>136</sup> One of the most important and highly debated issue that has been launched by the Lega in the government of Berlusconi is the quest for an 'anti-trust law'.

<sup>137</sup> See: Cesario/ Rovati (1989), Chapter 6. 'Vicinanza e lontananza socio-culturale il pregiudizio antimeridionale'.

not belong here, and those of 'us' who belong here. (Van Dijk, 1989:219)

With its gradual rapprochement to the political institutions the Lega has decided to substantially downplay openly racist elements. As demonstrated before (chapter 7.4.3.) hostile attacks on southern Italians or immigrants have sharply diminished in the Lega's campaigns. Public declarations and advertisements of the Lega explicitly confront this question, blaming the mass media for using the accusation of racism as part of their discriminating 'crusade' against Bossi's organization.

On the other hand, however, isolated but repeated racist incidents perpetrated by young Lega activists indicate how deeply rooted these irrational prejudices are in the collective identity of the Lega's constituency. Those who formerly painted slogans such as '*Forza Etna*' ('Come on Etna') are often not very willing to follow the new guidelines of the organization. The racist seeds of the formative period produce their fruits. One story is illuminating in this respect. In 1993 young Lega activists circulated posters with the clear message: "*Andate a casa terroni*" (Go back where you came from, *terroni*)<sup>138</sup>. After the public's awareness of this campaign, Bossi himself felt obliged to intervene and to apologize to all Italians for this 'intolerable' act. Commenting on the role of anti-southern feelings in the course of the Lega's mobilization, Bossi seeks to describe these elements as tactically conceived provocation basically alien to the very substance of the Lega's political identity. For him racist attacks were only an instrumental, but now abandoned means of political fighting. Addressing this point Bossi says:

We decided we should take advantage of the 'anti-meridionalism' diffused in Lombardy like in other regions in the north in order to attract the vast interest of a wider public and the mass media. Using deliberately rough expressions and putting the question of dialect in the middle of our propaganda helped to cause a scandal and to throw sand into the eyes of the Roman parties... (Bossi & Vimercati 1992:42)

More than just a tactical consideration is involved, however. In the related internal quarrel the critical point is touched upon of how one can define the features of belongingness to a community on the basis of a territorially defined collective identity which is not sanctioned by ethnic features or established civic rules. To be convincing the boundaries constructed on such features have to be confirmed by concrete lifeworld experiences. They have to resonate with the continuously changing perception of reality of the assigned constituency. Simultaneously, however, they have to be stable enough to furnish those indisputable legitimating resources needed to formulate the rights of the designated

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<sup>138</sup> *Terroni* is the abusive name for people from the south in the north widely used.

community. The latter point partly explains why the Lega still refers to an ethnic identity in spite of its evidently declining political meaning. The very authority of territorial politics is based on the notion of a stable and uncontested collective identity. Regarding the case of the Lega it is instructive to have a closer look at the related reflections of the leader of the Lega Veneta and former president of the Lega, Franco Rocchetta. Together with G. Miglio he represents the fraction within the Lega Nord that is most strongly committed to an ethnically defined notion of identity. In this context it is worth looking in more depth at his statement:

Realities like Tuscany, Lombardy, Veneto or Sicily; they are really European nations. Each of our regions is a homogenous society. Usually there is a great coincidence between the administrative boundaries, and the historical, economical and social boundaries.

Asked whether the homogeneity is ethnic or linguistic in character, he goes on:

An extremely thick and an extremely rich homogeneity. Each region, and every region is breathing in its own rhythm and mechanisms. They have existed for millennia .... It is not simply a linguistic problem, or a cultural problem. It is a spontaneous organization of society in a particular way. Economic structures and ways of life are exactly the same for the Venetians in South America and in Veneto. Simply because culture is more than music and language. It is the way to organize your society spontaneously.<sup>139</sup>

The randomness of the properties which constitute the community is obvious. Supposedly rooted in an eternal history, expressing a-historic values of the nation, what is said to be decisive for identifying a viable nation is ultimately the "spontaneous" organization of societal life. The authority of history, the claimed indubitable fact of at least four ethnically grounded peoples in the North of Italy<sup>140</sup>, faces a contemporary situation in which the associated collective identity is far from clear. Essentially, features of belonging are inarticulate. Implicit in Rocchetta's statement is the notion of a naturalness of each national community that, while apparent for each member, is beyond expression in objective terms. The effectiveness of such a framing of communal belonging in political mobilization is evident. Although built on the claim that it is based on definite criteria (history, a manifold homogeneity of the people), the boundaries of the community are by definition flexible. Changing values and features of social life can be referred to in order to give meaning to the

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<sup>139</sup> Interview conducted by Damian Tambini which will be published by Telos, 'Strategy or Identity? The Northern Leagues in Government' (in print).

<sup>140</sup> Even more articulate is the reference to the 'glorious' past of the Venice people in an interview given for Politique Internationale. Here the homogeneity is explicitly portrayed as something systematically obstructed by Roman colonial power. Still it is presented as the only legitimate basis for political reform and change in the Italian nation-state (See: Rocchetta 1992/93).

abstract notion of a 'national' identity. However, as further investigation will show, this kind of 'weak' territorial identity is at the same time the Achilles' heel of the Lega's mobilization. The present struggle within the Lega over whether to strengthen once again the 'ethnic' identity as the source of the Lega's protest or to further weaken it in its endeavor to become a national party reflects this difficulty.

Regarding the politically highly significant debate between Bossi and Rocchetta concerning the collective identity of the Lega, in the long run it was unavoidable that the two conceptions came into serious conflict. With the first electoral set-back the diverging position could no longer be reconciled in one political project. Consequently, Rocchetta has come to openly oppose the leadership of Bossi and his political orientation, launching his own, strictly ethnically defined movement *Liga Nathion Veneta* in September 1994<sup>141</sup>.

#### **7.4.6. The Lega as a Social Movement? The Dynamic of Institutionalization and the Drive towards a Mass Party**

The Lega's adoption of old and new elements from social movement repertoires poses the problem of how it can be situated within the current debate on the nature of social movements. Clarifying this question, it is necessary to elucidate the extent to which the Lega is a social movement and the extent to which it is a party. With regard to the somewhat questionable clear-cut distinction between a party and a social movement Mario Diani convincingly explains:

I suggest that the features of the processes I have described as a social movement do not exclude under certain and specific conditions the possibility that some political party might feel itself part of a movement and be recognized as such by other actors in the movement and by the general public.

The features Diani refers to are the following:

a) networks of informal interaction; b) shared beliefs and solidarity; c) collective action on conflictual issues; d) action which displays largely outside the institutional sphere and the routine procedures of social life. (Diani, 1992:15)

Before indicating how these characteristics can be identified particularly in the early years of the Lega it is instructive to recall that it represents a critical legitimating resource for this new agent in Italian politics to claim to be radically different from established parties. The Lega's political identity is based upon this claim. In this respect, the public image of

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<sup>141</sup> See: 'Bossi è vivo e vegeto', in: L'Indipendente, September 5, 1994.

being a social movement is, given its ideological stand, a central element in the legitimating discourse of the Lega. Analyzing its nature as a collective actor it is thus important to carefully differentiate between the self-assessment of the Lega and the factual form of political mobilization adopted. The deliberate attempt to describe itself as radically different from party politics should not be uncritically taken as a matter of fact.

The features identified by Diani as being critical to social movements are not frequent in Italian parties. In the Italian political situation the distinction between parties and movements is particularly sharp precisely because of some of the features that the Lega criticizes as perversions of Italian politics. In the 1980s in particular the parties traditionally in government almost completely lost their activist base in civil society and obtained the resources they needed directly from the state through subsidies, or from the economy in the form of bribes. This makes activism useless and even dangerous, and promotes a full identification with the state and a rejection of disruptive action forms. The only parties that keep a presence in the social movement sector are leftist parties such as the PDS and the organizations of the New Left. In a highly reduced form they still utilize social movement repertoires to supplement and strengthen their parliamentary strategies. Not having access to significant state resources they can only rely on activism. Hence, they partly fulfill the conditions of interconnection set forth by Diani.

The defining criteria features of a social movement listed by Diani were present in the Lega Lombarda particularly in its initial years. The Lega is a social movement in that it has had informal networks, has focused on conflictual issues and has often acted outside institutional spheres. In addition, by looking at the Lega Lombarda as a social movement, it should be noted that the Lega's objectives - at least at the present stage - are incompatible with the existing political system. At some stage of its mobilization the Lega explicitly advocated the dissolution of the Italian state. This utopian stand, with its polemics against the party system in general and its protest against the insufficiency of the Italian nation-state in particular - accused of not coming up to the needs of the people in Lombardy - puts the Lega in a position to call for political and social structures incompatible with contemporary ones. Social movements can be seen as political actors that do not have at their disposal the means by which to gain influence over the decision-making process in the existing political system. Therefore unconventional or disruptive forms of action are often utilized. Regarding this challenge to the boundaries of institutional politics, Offe describes the aspirations of a social movement in a way which reflects the claims of the Lega Lombarda: "The actor makes some

explicit claims that the means of action can be recognized as legitimate and the ends of action can become binding for the wider community." (Offe 1985)

With respect to the 'quality' of the political conflict raised, Lega uses extensively theatrical forms of action to attain a generalized Lombard cultural identity and political statehood. With the help of these forms of action it seeks to express a public protest against the suggested picture of an unacceptable domination by 'corrupt' parties ignorant of the needs of the region. In its action repertoire the Lega first of all attempted to be symbolically present in civil society, emphasizing its distinct character, contrary to the 'rules of the game' defined by the traditional parties (taken to be agencies of the centralized state)<sup>142</sup>.

The public manifestations of this regionalist protest movement indicate that the politics distinctive of the Lega cannot be understood as a narrowly defined electoral campaign. It is a mobilization which strives to create a 'we-feeling' that is an integral part of the mobilizing activities of most social movements<sup>143</sup>. In its action repertoire the Lega Lombarda refers to a kind of politics extensively performed by other 'new social movements': expressive action forms, non-clearly defined organizational structures, and irregular (discontinuous) militancy patterns. Even if gradual integration into the existing political system seems very probable at the present - the completion of the 'protest circle'<sup>144</sup> -, in the early 1990s the Lega is still more the vehicle of collective protest than a party with a narrowly defined action repertoire and a clear-cut program. Its program was generally considered utopian and is in constant flux.

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<sup>142</sup> The final goal of the Lega, that is how far they would like to go with their search for independence, has changed somewhat over time. Recently much emphasis has been put on federalist doctrines, and on the theorization of a 'Europe of regions'. However no formal request to dissolve nation states is put forward.

<sup>143</sup> See for this aspect: Melucci (1980).

<sup>144</sup> Drawing attention to the dynamic of the institutional sphere should clarify the process of transformation social movements undergo regarding their form and content when successfully challenging the established order. As Offe has pointed out (Offe 1990), there is a mechanism at work in the engagement of non-institutional movement politics which, in the course of its institutionalization, tends to weaken its radical demands and hence to significantly change its political identity. Movement politics is intrinsically transitory in nature. For Offe the phase of integration into the existing institutional framework of the state is the last stage in a sequence of steps toward deradicalization. According to his model the first phase of spontaneous mobilization, taking place in an institutional vacuum, is replaced by one characterized by the formalization of protest behavior (beginning decline of mobilization). The focus of political mobilization changes from rather unorganized direct action to more institutionalized forms in the parliamentary and administrative arena. This development has its own dynamic which leads to an extensive institutionalization allowing the protest actor to gain new alliances and to fortify its organizational capacity. On the other hand, as explained above, the resulting change in its political identity entails the high risk of alienating its activists and members (the German Greens are a prominent example) See for a similar model for analyzing the institutionalization of social movements: Rammstedt (1978). In unanimity with Offe's framework for him organization and institutionalization are the last two steps in the decline following the peak of a movement's mobilization.

The example of the campaign against the Martelli law as well as the 'tax strike' of the Lega indicate however that there is only a limited willingness on the part of the Lega's followers to actively engage in politics and rule out the suggestions formulated from the 'movement's leadership'. In the first case of the protest against the new law on immigration the Lega simply had to abandon its campaign when it became clear that they could not collect enough signatures for any further political step. Likewise, the call for tax disobedience was a failure. Having asked its constituency and supporters not to pay the basic tax and to invest its savings in foreign stocks rather than in the state-held *BOT*, the Lega faced such a united opposition in Italian public that it had to cancel its campaign. Besides, the strike was given little support.

If one takes the reaction of the traditional parties and of the media as a yardstick of the challenge the Lega represents to conventional politics, it becomes obvious that the - admittedly vague - political program of this new political actor greatly upsets the established political forces. From left to right they reacted in an extremely sensitive way to the accusations that the traditional party system is not able to adequately represent the people's needs in the region. Looking at the Lega Lombarda as the political vehicle for the protest against the domination of Rome and as an expression of the striving for a regional identity vis-à-vis the Italian nation-state, it becomes clear that the Lega is part of a much broader movement for political and cultural self-determination. It is a movement which includes many *leghe*, of which the Lega Lombarda is simply the most successful. Particularly in its formative years the Lega was and, to a certain extent still is, composed of actors that are not entirely ideologically or organizationally controlled by the administrative official apparatus. In this sense the Lega Lombarda fulfills what Klandermans describes as one of the main characteristics of a social movement: "Social movements are more than the sum of the organizations that identify with the movement." (Klandermans 1988)

Looking at the Lega Lombarda as part of a broader social movement also offers a fruitful insight into the political and ideological orientation of this organization. In a social movement, the process of production of ideology is relatively open and subject to the interaction of the different groups and individuals active in the framework of the movement's organizations. In contrast, it is relatively closed in established parties. If this process of identity formation is focused on it becomes clear that in the case of the Lega Lombarda the formation of a clear political identity is far from complete. In interpreting newly emerging collective actors it is often supposed that political actors know exactly what they want before

they enter the political process. But such an assumption is definitely not sustainable with regard to social movements which, by contrast, are characterized by a specific dynamic in their organizational and ideological orientation<sup>145</sup>.

As emerges from this study, the Lega is anything but a stable political phenomenon. Related to discussion on the nature of political mobilization generated by this new political actor this means that initially characterizing the Lega as a social movement does not exclude the possibility of increasingly identifying those elements in its engagement typical of traditional parties. In this context it is instructive to refer to a differentiation between political actors according to their specific mode of operation and their characteristic resource base. Focusing primarily on the institutional setting, one can distinguish<sup>146</sup> between a political party and a social movement. The former primarily seeks to occupy political power on the basis of electoral achievements. The focus of this type of political actor is hence consequently on the parliamentary arena. Social movements, on the other hand, put their emphasis on the attempt to catch the public's attention and to challenge authorities on the basis of the direct participation of their constituency in protest activities. The arena for this type of action is in effect the non-parliamentary sphere.

With its growing electoral success the Lega gradually shifted from the first to the second category. First of all, this development towards the model represented by other mass parties was expedited by the sheer organizational necessity that emerged with the rise of the Lega as a political force competing on a national scale. Commenting on the organizational logic intrinsic to the functional differentiation of such an actor Calise says:

...it also required a disciplined organization to consolidate electoral gains. Paradoxically enough, the movement that first outspokenly defied the regime of political parties, rapidly found itself falling into a process of partification: along with strong centralization -...- the League was quick to establish firm associational links with its electoral base, following the same path that had once proved to be a determinant for PCI and DC hegemony. (Calise 1993: 551)

Alongside this dynamic generated by internal organizational needs, and politically more important for the collective identity of the Lega, is the shift in the form of its political engagement. The more the Lega was able to overcome its long prevailing political isolation and its corresponding systematic exclusion from institutional power resources, the more it was willing to use traditional forms of political fight. The enhanced engagement in the political

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<sup>145</sup> See for this aspect: Eyerman/ Jamison (1991).

<sup>146</sup> I basically refer here to a differentiation between interest groups, political parties and social movements employed by Kriesi (See Kriesi 1989 and 1993)

system on its different administrative levels encouraged a change in the focus of the Lega's political campaigns. The growing access to formalized channels in decision-making furthered a development in the course of which the Lega has increasingly transmitted its extra-parliamentary political consensus into an institutionally confirmed basis of power. Accordingly, the emphasis on 'unconventional' forms of political actions, the classical domain of social movements, has lost much of its significance for the Lega<sup>147</sup>.

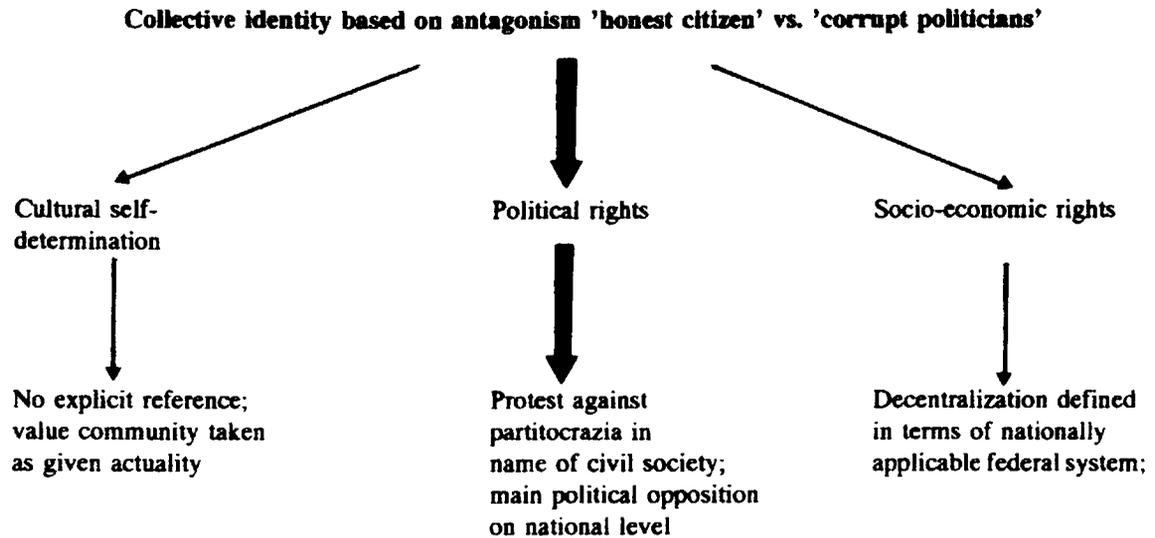
Notwithstanding this substantial shift, the Lega has not yet totally become into a traditional party. At least in its symbolic practice the Lega underlines its claim of being a political force that, although part of the Roman government, represents the interests and values of civil society and its citizens. In its self-assessment the Lega's authentic legitimation comes from the 'people' gathered at Pontida and approving leading figures and main political decisions by acclamation. In the political publications and declarations of the Lega, the institutional power in Rome is not a primary goal but a means in promoting the authentic interests of its constituency. It is along these lines that Bossi, in the Lega's most recent phase, defines the role of his organization as a 'controlling' institution for the current government. It is apparent that a substantial change in the Lega's focus of attention has important repercussions on the relationship between the organization and its activists and supporters. The imminent alienation between the 'movement' and its political representatives is a critical point in the concluding section about the present day challenges facing the Lega.

Regarding the mobilization cycle built on the irreconcilable populist protest against nation-state agencies, 1992 represented a critical turning point. In this period in Italian politics, characterized by the gradual deterioration of the so far hegemonic political forces, the Lega's radical opposition to any state institutions reached a point at which it threatened to become counterproductive in terms of generating further mobilization. The massive delegitimation of the established parties opened up new political opportunities for the Lega beyond radical, but politically impotent protest. The electoral successes in northern Italy made a prolongation of abstinence from institutional power less and less strategically appropriate. The dominant collective identity, defined by the incompatibility of the values of the northern communities with Rome-based politics, had to be revised in such a way as to allow the generated consensus to be taken advantage of. This meant first of all a further downplay of

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<sup>147</sup> A critical step in the Lega's twofold attempt firstly to confirm its claim to be a potential force of government and secondly to change the institutional setting of Italian politics according to its political goals was the referendum held in spring 1993 (see chapter 7.5.2.1.). The Lega then became a major political actor in the changing institutional setting of Italian politics.

the principle of territoriality in formulating the collective identity in order to render it congruous with political aspirations more and more directed towards national government.



Emphasis in Lega's political discourse in third and fourth phase

With respect to the transition in the phases from the early 1990s to the period that led to the formation of a national government it is worth pointing to the essential re-definition in the Lega's political discourse. With the main electoral successes, the main emphasis was here on frames addressing genuine political questions. The key political campaigns propagated nationally applicable solutions with a distinct universalistically framed legitimating discourse (federalism, renovating political system). In this context, the cultural discourse was strategically designed to sustain the accordingly framed collective identity: beyond strict territorial or ethnic standards, the Lega sought to base its integrative features on the antagonism between 'honest citizen' versus 'corrupt politician'. The principle of territoriality was redefined in terms of a value community with no distinct reference to a geographical place. Expanding beyond the originally assigned regions the defining reference to a distinct territorial entity was gradually given up. Correspondingly, the traditional agenda of regionalist movements on strict territorial self-determination was no longer as momentous as before. Socio-economic claims lost also much of their former significance in the Lega's political discourse. Emphasizing the entitlements of the rich northern regions would have meant to obstruct Bossi's declared aim to transform the Lega into a national political force.

After the electoral breakthrough in 1992 the emphasis in political discourse basically remained on the political opposition against the traditional Roman parties which on their part

became more and more involved in the deteriorating features of *tangentopoli*. What however became decisive in terms of a re-definition of the collective identity with the expansion on a national level is the credibility of the populist basis defined by the conflict between 'honest and competent citizen' versus 'corrupt and lethargic' state and politicians. The populist agenda of a radical opposition to the establishment threatened to lose its plausibility as a critical tool in reproducing political mobilization when the Lega decided to take political responsibility in regional and subsequently in national administration. As the following sections shall make clear, with this step Bossi's organization faced the problem to render harmonious its collective identity, based on the populist protest against the 'political class', and its actual performance in politics. The utopian promise to establish new forms of a more responsive political representation in smaller territorial units could no longer be exercised as a plain opposition against the 'politicians'. The vague notion of federalism and territorial self-determination had to be translated into concrete schemes for political change.

### 7.5. Towards a National Party of Government: Beyond Regionalism (1992-94)

The astonishing electoral success in 1992's general elections and in the subsequent provincial elections made a political option feasible that meant largely exceeding the boundaries of traditional regionalism. The declarations of the Lega, accompanied by - the until the end of 1993 - incessant rise, explicitly formulate the aspiration to become a political force determining the political fate of the entire country. Taking the pattern from Berlinguer, Bossi defined the Lega at this stage of its development as a *movimento di lotta e di governo* (movement of struggle and government)<sup>148</sup>. The new element was the distinct willingness to go into government and to re-direct the Lega's political engagement towards an intensified struggle within national political institutions.

This step towards a national force meant a final weakening of territoriality as a politically meaningful goal. Consequently, political goals such as regional self-determination or, more radically, the dissolution of the Italian nation-state, were thrust into the background. To the surprise of the Italian public (and probably to some groups in the Lega as well) Bossi announced that the idea of the *sessione*, the breaking-up of the country was only meant as a provocation to the existing power groups<sup>149</sup>. According to the Lega's charismatic leader the principle of federalism can instead be seen as the (nationally applicable) core idea of the Lega's political fight.

Likewise the 'anti-institutional' and 'anti-party' stand of the Lega was at this stage about to become a matter of the past. The Lega's opposition to the entire political establishment has originally been instrumental to its being viewed as a force outside the irresponsive party system. Its irreconcilable opposition to the political world in Rome has been the very source of its electoral success. However, the Lega as a political movement beyond the existing institutional setting of Italian politics has reached a point where it has become necessary to transform its uncommitted protest into concrete steps toward change and reform in order to maintain its credibility. On the national, as well as on the local level, the Lega faced the situation of being dependent on forms of collaborations with other political

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<sup>148</sup> See: L. Rossi 'Lega di lotta e di governo', in: Lega Nord, No.7, February 24, 1993.

<sup>149</sup> The Italian sociologists Diamanti and Mannheim have analyzed this 'metamorphose' of the Lega as a decisive step towards an enlargement of its potential electorate (See: 'La metamorfosi di Bossi', in: Il Manifesto, 19.1.93) Regarding the probable scenario that the Lega will govern in Varese by the support of the PDS, see on the article by F. Adornato: LaRepubblica, 17./18.1.93, 'L'alleanza Bossi-Occhetto', p.14.

forces to gain administrative power<sup>150</sup>. As the undisputed leader of the Lega stated at the first national congress of the *Lega Nord Liguria*, it was time for the Northern Leagues "to create an administrative capacity" in order to be the heir of the old system which comes to an end. This change, however, must necessarily be realized in cooperation with traditional political forces<sup>151</sup>.

Given its until then prevailing attitude of 'system opposition' such a major political re-orientation meant a risk for the integrating collective identity of the Lega. Due to the above described preceding changes in its political discourse away from the pattern of ethno-regionalism, however, the prospect of taking responsibility in national government was not perceived as an immediate contradiction to the established political identity. The decision to expand the assigned constituency and to change some key goals was gradually introduced, giving up bit-by-bit the Lega's crucial reference to geographical entity as the basis for mobilization. Regarding the substantial shift in emphasis in the content of the Lega's campaigns, Pasquino accurately observes: "The regionalist cleavage, or the center-periphery conflict, are only a pretext for the Lega, they simply constitute a starting point for its mobilization." (Pasquino 1991: 557)

In terms of the Lega's eventual rise a new qualitative level in the Lega's mobilization was reached. For Diamanti, the year 1992 represents the watershed dividing two major periods of the Lega's mobilization from each other. Referring to two phases of its development he states:

1. The party of Umberto Bossi was initially confirmed in the productive peripheries of the north, its 'genetic zone'. Here, it became the party of the new middle class which had emerged from the second industrial revolution of the 1970s with its explosion of small businesses. Independent workers and peasants are among the most supportive groups for the Lega.
2. But from 1992 onwards the Lega became the first party of the big cities in the north. Here the votes come mainly from the middle and grand urban bourgeoisie. And here begin the problems: Bossi faced the need to cope with an electorate with very different claims and characteristics. The bourgeoisie asks for the reform of the state and demand to carry the country towards the Second Republic.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> This collaboration has necessarily significant repercussions on the collective identity of the Lega which attraction was largely rooted in its image of a movement beyond party channels. See on this aspect of the consequences of the inescapable alignment strategies of territorial movements: (Newman, 1992).

<sup>151</sup> In: Corriere della Sera, 21.12.92)

<sup>152</sup> Diamanti, Ilvo in an interview for Agenzia Giornalistica Italia, Dec. 6, 1993 ('Perché ha >perso< la Lega').

In adopting this role of an agent of institutional change, in 1992's political campaigns the Lega continued to represent the intransigent opposition, the 'old regime'. Analyzing in more detail some of these campaigns, however, it becomes manifest how the uncommitted protest behavior was increasingly combined with feasible political options for concrete change in the political system.

### 7.5.1. Fiscal Disobedience and the Features of a Populist Protest on a National Scale

In its attempt to establish itself as a political force on a national level and to overcome its being restricted to the north, Bossi modified the weight in the Lega's political campaigns. In spite of an overarching ideological reference point, 'federalism', the traditional agenda of regionalist protest was ultimately thrust into the background. In 1992 with its protest against taxes on private houses<sup>153</sup>, but particularly in the second half of 1993, initiated by the government's plan to introduce a minimum tax for self employed labour force, the campaigns shifted towards a protest against the tax load. Although it had always been an integral part of its political programme, now the Lega launched more drastical crusades against the tax load. With its call for a '*rivolta fiscale*' (fiscal revolt) the Lega gave this protest a more radical direction, openly inviting civil disobedience<sup>154</sup>. It was clear that with such an agenda the Lega would effectively appeal to the small business men primarily concerned<sup>155</sup>. In its populist campaigns the Lega explicitly compares the current tax policy with "state sanctioned burglary" (Formentini) concentrating on those fiscal burdens of major and immediate concern for the people (fuel, rent, private property, etc.).

Notwithstanding the fact that neither the 'tax strike' nor the boycott against the state loan BOT were successful in their actual consequences, the Lega symbolically underlined that it was the spearhead of the protest against Rome and the state bureaucracy. As Biorcio had observed earlier:

The issue of anti-tax protest, particularly perceived by the small autonomous bourgeoisie and typical of many populist movements, becomes one of the main connotations of the protest against Rome. (Biorcio 1992: 130)

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<sup>153</sup> See: Claudio Bernieri, 'Con il "oia chi paga" parte la sfida a Gorla', in: Europeo, No.37, 1992.

<sup>154</sup> See: S. Faverio, 'No alla minimum tax', in: Lega Nord, March, 24, 1993.

<sup>155</sup> With the tax revolt the Lega was in fact able to overcome the resistance it was still facing in the business community in northern Italy. See: Gennaro Schettino 'I commercianti si scoprono leghisti. "Non pageremo la minimum tax"', in: LaRepubblica, 29.9.93.

The fiscal revolt is, however, part of the broader campaign the Lega was conducting at this stage of its mobilization. The protest against the tax burden, the announcement that it was opting for the secessionist solution and supporting an autonomous Northern Republic as well as the campaigns against corrupt politicians and the call for new elections: all these campaigns are organized around the central claim that the current nation-state's government, and hence its institutions, are critically delegitimized. It is no longer the incompatibility between the northern community and the centralized nation-state as such that is at the core of the Lega's political reasoning. More important now is the image of an irreconcilable conflict between the political class and the 'ordinary' citizens of which the Lega claims to be the political advocate. In this respect the fiscal protest and the announced plebiscite on federalism, designed to bring an end to the government under Ciampi, were the two closely related main campaigns in conflictualizing this notion of this intolerable split between citizens and the governing elite<sup>156</sup>. As Bossi said at a Lega's meeting at Curno with over 10.000 activists (26.9.93):

They (politicians/ O.S.) think legality coincides with the palace. It is not the Lega that is illegally pushing for new elections but it is those *signori* (gentlemen), it is the president of the Republic, that are illegal.

After its success in the 1992 general elections and with the accelerating crisis produced by the investigation of the juridical pool *mani pulite*, the Lega sought to become confirmed as the major force of opposition, accusing the PDS of being part of the traditional nomenclature. With its radical oppositional role against the declining political elite of the country the Lega reached the peak of its political support. Before the advent of *Forza Italia*, in the second half of 1993, according to surveys, the Lega could expect to attract nationally 19% and in the north of Italy 35% of the votes<sup>157</sup>.

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<sup>156</sup> Bossi explicitly stated that the tax revolt was not least invented in order to force the government to accept precipitated general elections (see: 'Bossi: "Basta stangate. No al canone Rai"', in: LaRepubblica, 6.9.93.

<sup>157</sup> Survey published in L'Espresso, 26.09.93.

### 7.5.2. The Public and the Lega: Beyond Antagonism?

Notwithstanding the still prevailing negative framing of the Lega in the media, in this crucial field of public discourse the Lega was increasingly perceived in a way conducive to its political mobilization. For the most recent phase of the Lega's political battle Costantini even notices a trend that, mainly due to the sensation-oriented logic of media attendance, tends to make its charismatic leader a kind of 'modern hero'. Commenting on the radically changed attitude of the mass media vis-à-vis the Lega Constantini states:

Nowadays the press and television cover all the Lega's initiatives and campaigns with particular attention, sometimes even in an exaggerated way. The initiatives of the Lega's leading figures are now often made subject of long debate amongst the opinion leaders (Costantini 1993:90)

Constantini speaks of a 'phase of visibility' (1989-92) typified by a notable rise in interests on the part of the mass media, gradually replaced by the 'phase of dominance' lasting until today. The latter period is characterized by the Lega as an agenda setter. In fact, even if negatively framed, the activities of the Lega and particularly the provocations of Bossi and Miglio attracted full media coverage. Beyond the political message as such, the Lega fulfilled the criteria critical for media attention: it is new, provocative, polarizing and rich in symbolically mediated visibility. Having entered the realm of legitimate political discourse, the Lega was perceived by journalists as a welcome change in the Roman political world traditionally shaped by semi-clandestinity and secretiveness. The Lega has become a prominent actor in the turmoil provoked in the Italian political system with *tangentopoli*.

Regarding the concrete attitude of the Italian public to the extraordinary electoral success of the Lega two clearly opposed attitudes can be identified which, however, both recognize the Lega as a serious challenge to the present. On the one hand, the press somewhat changed its unequivocally negative attitude towards the Lega. In correspondence with the shift in the Lega's framing, Bossi's organization was increasingly interpreted in terms of a rebellious force challenging the discredited political establishment. The Lega's engagement in the *Commissione Bicamerale*, its activity in the first communal administrations and the de-radicalization of its programmatic concerns have contributed to bringing the Lega's expulsion from the 'legitimate' political discourse to an end. By the media the Lega was widely described in terms of its oppositional role against the *partitocrazia*. In this respect, the caricature documented here, which was published by La Repubblica the day after the general elections in 1992, represents the end of definite hostility at least of a considerable part of the Italian media. The electoral success of the Lega is framed as the 'lethal' attack on the traditional parties (in the caricature Bossi cuts off the heads of main figures of the main

political parties: Andreotti, Craxi and Occhetto). The Lega was increasingly perceived as a serious political actor in the thorough crisis of Italian politics.

In contrast, the established parties launched their last attempt to exclude the Lega from the legitimate political discourse of the country. The political counter-mobilization was predominantly organized around the accusation of the perceived threat of splitting up Italy as a likely consequence of the Lega's rise<sup>158</sup>. The traditional parties and major institutions of the country, regardless of ideological differences, were united in painting up the image of an intolerable, even dangerous political force. The



Figure 13: Caricature published by La Repubblica, April 7., 1992

Lega's mobilization was cleverly connected with the scenario of the end of the unitarian Italian nation-state and, more drastically, with the Yugoslavian example of a civil war<sup>159</sup>. Even the Catholic church, through the authority of the pope's voice, felt obliged to counteract the aspirations of Bossi and his associates<sup>160</sup>. The objective of the harsh reaction was clearly to reinforce the national identity which came under surge.

On the part of the Lega itself the access to media coverage was reinforced by an important decision. In curious unanimity with a long tradition in Italian politics, the Lega succeeded in gaining indirect support by a nationally distributed newspaper, the L'Indipendente. Beyond its own publication that is basically designed as a means of election campaigns and an internal form of communication for the members, the Lega thus got access to a wider public for spreading its ideas.

<sup>158</sup> See as a representative interpretation the analysis of Giuliano Ferrara, the well known political commentator and since recently minister in Berlusconi's cabinet: 'Dietro il folklore "barbaro" la minaccia separatista' in: Corriere della Sera, 27.9.93. See also Giorgio Bocca's opinion: 'Attenti, barbari', in: La Repubblica, 29.9.93.

<sup>159</sup> See as an example of the repeated attempts to discredit the Lega on these grounds: 'L'Italia non si divide. Ciampi, Napolitano, Spadolini: alt a Bossi', in: La Repubblica, 29.9.93.

<sup>160</sup> See: 'Papa Wojtyla esalta l'unità della nazione', in: La Repubblica, 29.9.93.

### 7.5.2.1. Institutional Reform: Changing Political Opportunities

The referendum of April 18, 1993 was undoubtedly a significant turning point in Italian politics and for the Lega. It impressively showed how public upheaval could be translated into institutional reform, and how the old way of preserving the established power structures by reshuffling influence from one part of the governing bloc to the other, could no longer be exercised. With regard to the subsequent institutional changes, commentators have come to speak of a 'New Republic'. The dissatisfaction with the way politics had traditionally been performed was manifested in the over 82.7% of the electorate that abandoned the old political system based on proportional representation. The most important question of the referendum was the proposal to change the electoral procedure for the Senate to a majoritarian system (with some proportional elements) and the decision to end state funding of political parties (90.3% in favor).

Yet, the campaigns preceding this referendum were not focused on the specific meaning of the alternative electoral designs. Almost unanimously, the decision in favor of the electoral reform was portrayed as a vote against the *partitocrazia*, against the dominance of the old establishment and the threat of 'ungovernability'. The reform was presented as the introduction of procedures designed to threaten the power of the old parties and to enhance the participatory power of the single citizen (for example, in June 1993 mayors in some major Italian cities were elected directly for the first time). Being aware of the result of the vote one has to be aware that the campaigns were less focused on the aspects of the institutional change in a narrower perspective; rather, the referendum was widely portrayed as a decision against *partitocrazia*, against the established power structures of the Roman parties and in favor of a more direct participation of the citizen vis-a-vis the political process. For the Lega the referendum was a means of putting an end to the power structures established by the traditional parties and of pushing for new elections<sup>161</sup>.

Regardless of this interpretation of the referendum, it is instructive to ask what the actual consequences of this institutional change are particularly concerning the Lega, a strong supporter of the reform. Given the range of the defined reforms one can legitimately state that a brand new party system is about to emerge that has already altered and will further change the landscape in Italian politics. Firstly, one has to be aware that after the overwhelming majority in favor of a majoritarian system for the Senate there is a broad political consensus for change in the electorate procedure for the Parliament, the *Camera dei Deputati* (House

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<sup>161</sup> See the special issue on the referendum in Lega Nord, March 29, 1993.

of Deputies). In his inaugural speech the head of the former government, Ciampi, made it one of his priorities to complete the fundamental institutional change in Italian politics introduced by the 'popular will'. A decisive step in this direction was the voting in parliament to change the electoral procedures for the Camera for 75% of its deputies to a 'first-past-the-post-system' August, 3, 1993.

By changing the 'rules of the game' in Italian politics the Lega could establish itself as an important agent of change in times of crisis. The Lega was firmly confirmed as an expression of, and simultaneously a driving force in, the massive transformation which the Italian political system is undergoing. With this step new political opportunities in the parliamentary arena came up. The shift in the Lega's emphasis in conducting its campaigns away from anti-institutional protest forms has to be seen against the background of this development through which the Lega obtained a far more important say in the institutional setting of Italian politics.

Now, what does this fundamental reform mean politically in Italy? Based on surveys conducted in 1993 (before the rise of *Forza Italia*), one could predict a political split of the country into three parts: the south dominated by the Christian Democrats, the center controlled by the left (PDS) and the north in the hands of the Lega<sup>162</sup>. If this scenario were to become real, the Lega would have realized its attempt to create three distinct macro-regions (at least politically) by the backdoor. The first-past-the-post-system would itself work to generate such a territorially distinct distribution of the country's political representatives. Obviously such a development would significantly increase the political weight of the Lega.

On the other hand, however, the electoral reform poses some serious risks to the Lega, as recent political developments in Italian politics have shown. First of all, it makes the Lega's outspoken goal of expanding its sphere of influence to the South more difficult, if not impossible, in the long term. As yet the electoral support for the Lega is small in the center and minimal in the south and this will not change in essence within the foreseeable future. With a strict majoritarian system the prospect of expanding beyond the original stronghold in northern Italy is extremely small<sup>163</sup>. Moreover, it is not at all certain that the Lega will be the strongest political force in the north and hence profit from the first-past-the-post-

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<sup>162</sup> See: *La Repubblica*, 'Il doppio rebus di Scalfaro', 2.4.93.

<sup>163</sup> That the Lega is aware of this risk shows their change in attitude towards the question of the best electoral system. Being highly supportive of a majoritarian system in the context of April's referendum the Lega now favors a proportional system for the House of Deputies with a five-percent barrier for small parties.

system. As is clearly reflected in the older program of the Lega, small territorial based movements normally have a structural disadvantage in a majoritarian system. Hence, although opening up the prospect of politically conquering the north, the institutional reforms might impede the long-term national aspirations of the Lega.

### 7.5.3. Symbolic Staging of Anti-party Sentiments: Opposition Against 'Partitocrazia'

Reflecting the important change in its political strategy of gaining influence, the Lega's political identity was exposed to some significant 'readjustments'. This period of the Lega's mobilization is in fact characterized by the peculiar coexistence of confirming its radical opposition against the entire political elite of the country and of simultaneously advancing the pragmatic concern of how to enter into national politics. It was critical here, as mentioned before, to downplay the formerly constitutive territorial identity and hence to avoid the restrictions implied by its features.

In effect, the pattern of territorial belonging, far beyond the classical agenda of regional self-determination, primarily serves as the embodiment of those values, supposedly alien to the 'corrupt and delegitimized' political establishment. In accordance with the Lega's 'expansionist' political aspirations, the territory in a geographical sense is of less and less importance. With the scandalous revelations of *tangentopoli* Bossi growingly presents his organization as the only legitimate safeguard of democratic values and institutions. The new political identity of the Lega becomes obvious in a statement of Bossi made regarding the government's unwillingness to allow new elections. He said:

In this case the Lega would be constrained to react to a regime that is heading towards totalitarianism. Probably the Lega, as a democratic political force, would not usually use certain means but a situation might come up in this country that might force us into the formation of partisan groups. If the demand for change is so great in the country, these *scarafaggi* ('cockroaches') can not suppress an entire people down only because they are called Christian Democrats, Socialist and Communists.<sup>164</sup>

In this admittedly drastic announcement the most important elements of this period of the Lega's mobilization at the peak of the crisis of the political system are evident. Bossi's

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<sup>164</sup> Bossi, 'Alle urne o può essere guerra', in: *Corriere della Sera*, 12.5.93. Along the lines of such belligerent announcements Bossi recently chocked the Italian public with the declaration that in the mid 1980s 300.000 people from the region around Bergamo were ready for a violent insurrection against the Rome. This statement was meant to underline the 'revolutionary' potential of the Lega and to emphasize the democratic character of the Lega. According to Bossi it was he himself who stopped the people from the armed revolt. See: 'Nel Bergamasco 300 mila erano pronto', in: *Corriere della Sera*, August 30, 1994.

associates seek to present themselves somewhat like this: the Lega is the only force fighting for democratic change against the combined attempt of the established parties and institutions to preserve the existing power structures<sup>165</sup>. With the rise of the Lega the struggle for survival of the old regime has entered a decisive stage, posing the alternative between radical democratic change (led by the Lega) or the further and even violent radicalization of the fight 'people against politicians'.

Here a short excursion into the physiognomy of the political campaigns in general and the political climate of the 1994 general elections in particular is instructive. It is against this background that the Lega's strategy in conducting its populist protest becomes clearer. With the decline of the old parties, the entire political debate has become organized around the abstract opposition between the 'old' and the 'new'. It has not been concrete programmatic points regarding certain policy areas, that in the course of the accelerating crisis, have caught the attention of the Italian public. Rather, public discourse has been shaped by strong, albeit politically unspecific, will for change, defined by the outspoken opposition to the established political elite. Commenting this feature the philosopher Lucio Colletti states:

The political debate is contaminated with a series of paroles to which a quasi magic significance is contributed: 'old' and 'new'. In reality, these are highly general and empty terms that demonstrate the obscure and demagogic character of the political struggle we are witnessing since April 1992. Politics, however, is judged on the basis of facts."<sup>166</sup>

Regarding the last sentence one might be inclined to agree with Colletti on normative grounds. The first part of his statement is, however, more appropriate to explain on which features dominant political discourse politics is mainly based and political orientations are formed.

In the referendum on the institutional reform the debate was organized around the antagonism between the 'old', representing the established proportional representation political establishment, and the 'new', striving for the inauguration of the majoritarian system. With some justification the former was identified with the political establishment and the latter option was perceived as a step towards a revolutionary change in Italian politics. In this categorical antagonism the debate about the concrete meaning and consequences of a strict

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<sup>165</sup> See: Bossi, '1994: cade la dittatura!', in: Lega Nord, September 20, 1993. And also: E. Bassani, 'Bossi: cosi attaccheremo il regime', in: Lega Nord, *ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Corriere della Sera 25.3.94. Along the same lines the Italian philosopher from the left Norberto Bobbio said: "I have the impression that regarding its politicians as regarding its ideas, the right represents more the 'new' than the left." (*ibid.*)

majoritarian electoral system of the British kind did not catch the attention of the Italian public. The reform was primarily welcomed for the sake of change as such<sup>167</sup>. The entire campaign for the general elections in 1994 was clustered around the same abstract antagonism. Thematic debates receded from the dominant political discourse being overwhelmed by the fight between the 'old parties' and the new forces claiming to introduce 'revolutionary change' in Italian politics<sup>168</sup>.

It is against this background that in his electoral campaign for the general elections Bossi vigorously accused Berlusconi of representing the *riciclati del vecchio regime*<sup>169</sup>. Denying their 'novelty', in the colorful language of the Lega, the Berlusconi and the other partners are dubbed 'recycled elements' from the old system. Following its established populist pattern of political mobilization, the Lega portrayed itself as "*potentissima*" (highly powerful), "radical" and "revolutionary" without specifying in what the aspired change was supposed to consist. The coexistence of the drastic character of the Lega's political claims and the highly vague solutions proposed forms the core of its populist success. It was the Lega's obvious strategy to fight the newly emerging *Forza Italia* with the same interpretative frame according to which all Romans are equally discredited and that it is only the Lega which will bring about fundamental change. In the programmatic article for these elections the underlying strategic goals are belligerently framed (Title: 'Enemies: It is time for the retaliation of the North') as such: "The Lega has now decided to use *Forza Italia*, created by the DC to destroy the Lega, in order to destroy the DC." It is predominantly the political center which is contested and where, given the discredited governing bloc under the DC and the PSI, the abstract counterposition between the new and the old is effectively employed.

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<sup>167</sup> This is the main reason why the arguments of Leoluca Orlando's Rete, definitely not part of the political establishment, did not enter the main political discourse preceding the referendum in April 1993. Its reasoning, according to which the majoritarian is everything but per se a guarantee for democracy, did not find serious resonance outside its stronghold Sicily.

<sup>168</sup> See in this context the analysis of Gambino for whom the 'new', far from being realized in actual politics, is primarily a task for the future, - notwithstanding the declarations of the political actors themselves ('I limiti del "novismo"', in: La Repubblica, 25.5.1993.

<sup>169</sup> See on this point Roberto di Caro's article: 'Se non ce la fate non li votate', L'Espresso, March 11, 1994, p.70-71. See also Bossi and his reasoning for the engagement in the polo della libertà: 'Con la Lega il "polo della democrazia"' in: Lega Nord, February 2, 1994.

**7.5.4. The Elections in 1994: the First Setback for the Lega**

Looking more closely at the outcome of the April elections it becomes clear that behind the overall picture of a general halt of the Lega's rise there are more specific and more telling features about the Lega's electoral results. Some results are enlightening, especially regarding the question of where the transformed collective identity of the Lega Nord is still or increasingly appealing and where it has lost parts of its attraction. There are two observations which can serve as a basis for explaining the disequilibrium in voting behavior.

A first point in this respect is that the Lega is no longer the political force in which the young electorate (under 24) is over-represented as in the past. As documented in the table on this page the

**Table: Electoral Behavior of Young Population (18-24) in General Election '94 (Northern Italy).**

Party	Youth	Total
Rif. Com.	6.2	6.7
Rete	3.0	1.1
Verdi	2.9	2.7
PDS	20.0	20.5
PSI	1.2	4.0
PPI	6.5	10.6
Patto	2.7	3.7
Forza Italia	21.5	20.7
Lega Nord	16.6	15.6
Alleanza Na.	17.1	9.2
Others	2.3	5.2
Total	100	100

figures for the younger population voting for the Lega is almost identical to the total of the Lega's electorate in Northern Italy. Proportionally high is the preference of the youths for L. Orlando's *La Rete* (citizens' network) and, interestingly, in particular for the neo-fascist *Alleanza Nazionale* headed by Fini. In the 1994 general elections the younger part of the Italian population has chosen to a high degree a rightist alternative. Supposing that the vote from this social group is largely motivated by protest behavior, one could formulate the following thesis: it was no longer the Lega that in Northern Italy has predominantly profited from a radicalized protest vote; its role as the anti-establishment force, at least insofar as one can conclude from the youth's preference, has partly been taken over by other political parties.

Probably more revealing is the geographical distribution of the votes for the Lega. As emerges from table VII, compared to the results in 1990 and 1992 in latest general elections the Lega is strong in its traditional strongholds. In Lombardy, Piemonte and particularly in Veneto, the Lega could even increase its share of the votes. In the center of Italy, and here first of all in the left-dominated Emilia Romagna and in Tuscany, the Lega had to accept a notable set-back. It is worth recalling that it was the center that was declared a main political

target (especially of Bossi) in order to go beyond the territorial restrictiveness the Lega has to face. As in its early days, the Lega has in fact been far more successful in those areas with a distinct catholic culture, in the 'white zones' than in those traditionally shaped by a communist-leftist political subculture like in Emilia Romagna or in Tuscany. The further ambition of gaining a foothold in the south of the country is obviously a total failure. The result of the European election in May 1994 even more radically confirms this electoral trend. The Lega's explicit aim to tap new social groups, particularly in the center, has failed.

**Table VIII:** Regional distribution of electoral support for the Lega Nord 1990 (Regional Council) and general elections in 1992/ 1994 (Chamber of Deputies)

Region	1990 %	1992 %	1994 %
Piemonte	8.6	14.9	15.0
Lombardia	68.9	44.1	45.1
Liguria	4.1	5.2	4.3
Trentino-A.A.	-	1.7	1.5
Veneto	10.5	16.9	21.7
Friuli-Ven..	-	4.0	4.6
Emilia-Rom.	5.0	8.6	6.0
Toscana	1.2	2.4	1.7
Other Reg.	1.4	2.2	1.4

Taking a more detailed look at the electoral results another figure is worth pointing out: regarding the support for the Lega there are significant differences within the regions, namely Piemonte and Lombardy. There is a striking gap between a rural and an urban setting regarding the electoral affirmation of the Lega. Comparing 1992 with 1994's result (Source: DOXA) the Lega lost 1.9% and 2.8% in Turin and Milan respectively, whereas in the non-metropolitan provinces in Piemonte and Lombardy it won 0.8% and 1.5% respectively. A similar development can be seen here: the Lega declined somewhat in those areas where it expanded its consensus in the early 1990s.

**Table:** Electoral results for the most important political forces in European elections in May 1994 according to geographical distribution of votes

	Nord West	Nord East	Center	South	Islands
Forza Italia	34.4%	28.7%	26.1%	28.7%	34.3%
Alleanza Naz.	7.5%	9.4%	18.7%	22.8%	16.8%
Lega Nord	15.8%	10.0%	0.8%	0.5%	0.5%
PDS	12.8%	19.4%	25.5%	16.5%	12.3%
Rif. Com.	6.3%	3.9%	8.1%	6.2%	4.6%
PPI	9.3%	11.8%	8.7	11.1%	10.9%
Patto Segni	2.9%	3.5%	3.0%	2.0%	5.9%

How can these figures be evaluated against the background of the Lega's substantially redefined political identity? Evidently, the Lega's declared aim to become a national organization was a failure. The vacuum left behind by the traditional parties, foremost in the political center, was no longer quasi automatically occupied by the Lega. The emergence of a new political force such as *Forza Italia* repressed the Lega in those areas, strategically targeted as potential new spheres of influence. The character of its newly framed collective identity, contrasting the honesty and competence of civil society with the corrupt practices of the political establishment, no longer had a mobilizing effect as before. Evidently, *Forza Italia* attracted more effectively those voters that, regardless of their regional belonging, were looking for an alternative to the discredited parties until recently dominant in Italian politics. From the electoral results a seemingly paradoxical situation in the Lega's mobilization emerges. Although Bossi's organization deliberately sought to extend its collective identity, to integrate new social strata into its political project and thus to weaken its territorially restricted reach, the Lega still won in its original strongholds. The leagues were confirmed where the sensation of territorially shaped provenance is the strongest. The Lega has returned to the origins of its mobilization.

## 7.6. Challenges and Prospects

This first set-back of the Lega is not only due to the rise of Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*. Rather, the deeper reasons for the stagnation have to be seen against the background of the critical organizational and political changes and their significant repercussions on the collective and political identity of the Lega. These can be best analyzed with regard to various important dilemmas this organization has had to face in the process of reacting to new social grievances and political opportunities. In short, the Lega has the fundamental problem to bring its integrating collective identity and the strategic decisions taken in response to the new opportunities in Italian politics into harmony. This, however, is decisive for the success of its mobilizing efforts in current politics. As Newman correctly observes:

The politicization and transformation of ethnic identities accounts for more than just the rise of new ethnic political conflicts. The manner in which ethnic identifications are politicized helps determine the ability of ethnic political movements to endure social, economic and political changes. (Newman 1992: 224-225)

In judging the substantial change in the Lega's collective identity one has to be aware of one crucial point. Although the campaigns and the political aspirations have shifted substantially towards a 'national design', the structure of the Lega's mobilization dynamic still follows the same genuine logic. Although it has entered the center-right coalition under Berlusconi it still claims that its own political project is incompatible with the 'old regime'. "North versus South" has been replaced by "honest and popular" versus "corrupt and arrogant" (characterization of traditional parties), but the appeal of the Lega is continuously rooted in the image of a categorical disparity with the political establishment in Rome. The binary code, shaped by the opposition to traditional politics in Italy, still models the Lega's mobilization effort. The shift in the political identity and the correlated strategic choice have, however, caused the Lega some critical problems in maintaining the plausibility of its political approach. The following critical challenges to the Lega's mobilization can be identified:

a. One of the most fundamental dilemmas the Lega faces is the consideration of whether the source of its success, its rootedness in a cultural identity particular to the Northern regions, and the ambition to expand the Lega to all parts of Italy might be perceived as a contradiction. It has been and still is the particularity of this new force in Italian politics that it has been successful in creating a viable political subculture in which its mobilization is embedded. With this, it filled the vacuum left behind by the declining bonds with which Catholicism and Marxism used to secure the support of their respective clientele beyond disputes over single political decisions. The reference to a certain territory, or at least to a culturally integrated community was successful in replacing these traditionally decisive bonds

of Italian politics. Ideologically, a move towards a national force with the dominant abstract goal of federalism might threaten the image of a political movement which has claimed to be rooted in a particular subculture defined by a distinct territorially conceived work ethic and a popular opposition against the ruling elites. With the abandonment of the territorial principle in mobilization, the reference to the northern community which values were made the basis for the politicized feeling of superiority over the rest of the country become blurred.

Likewise in another perspective the principle of territoriality causes problems for the process of mobilization. The features of the severe contemporary crisis of the old political regime, the continuous revelations about cases of corruption and permanent misuse of power, on the one hand, have essentially spurred the mobilization of the Lega (in its role of an opposition to all traditional parties discredited by the corruption scandals). On the other hand, the disclosure of the structural misuse of political power in Italian politics is another element which jeopardizes the Lega's attempt to give credibility to its view of reality. The region which has been and still is primarily hit by the corruption scandals of *tangentopoli* is not the *Mezzogiorno* but, in fact, Milan, the center of the Lega's political engagement. Manifestly, a crude contradiction between the supposedly Mafia dominated South and the 'honest' North has been discredited by the sheer facts of political life.

After some time of silence on this issue, the Lega has, however, found a way of framing these scandals compatible with its overall approach. The Lega's essential ideological framework of the North-South split interprets the myriad cases of corruption and clientilism not as moral failures of single politicians but as a discrediting feature of the established political system and its main representatives, the national parties. Nonetheless, this strategy was conducted only after a certain time of the Lega's abstinence in the discourse on *manipulite*. It was only with the critical shift of the Lega's political discourse to the national level, that the corruption scandals in Northern Italy were perceived as an opportunity to spur the Lega's mobilization. However, it is noteworthy in this context that the Lega's campaigns against *i partiti* as its main political adversary was focused less on the political practices of politicians in Milan (which would have been typical of a regionalist movement), but rather on the Roman environment. The 'evil', the corruption and the disfunction of public/ political institutions is blamed unilaterally on the structures established by the nation-state agencies<sup>170</sup>.

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<sup>170</sup> Diamanti's (1992) finding that the political identity of the Lega is mainly based on the antagonism toward the Roman nomenclature rather than on an explicit notion of a Lombard or Northern identity.

b. The expansion to the south as the decisive element in the Lega's attempt to establish itself as an influential national force has meant another conflict that this organization has to solve in the course of its mobilization in order to keep its collective identity and its political-strategic options compatible and hence credible. One crucial moment for the Lega's appeal amongst the electorate in the North was undeniably its populist demarcation from the South, which has been portrayed as being the origin of the devastating features of the present political situation, i.e., corruption and clientilism, have their roots. However, in order to gain credibility and support on a national level, the Lega decided to play down its originally often open racist practices against people from the *Mezzogiorno* and from outside Europe. The Lega now has to cope with the radicalized fruits of its own original attempt to build up a strong collective identity based upon the antagonism between 'We' and the 'Other': outspoken racist fractions within the Lega accuse its leadership of collaborating or at least of being too tolerant towards those who were said to be alien to the community. In effect, the openly racist anti-southern stand, initially integral part of its collective identity, has lastingly de-qualified the Lega in the South of Italy and, to a lesser extent, in the center.

c. More significant, however, are the ramifications of the Lega's decision to substantially change its relation to the political institutions on the nation-state level. Until recently it was crucial to the Lega to present itself as the 'enemy' of those structures and institutions which have dominated Roman government and bureaucracy. Still in 1992 in its publication this issue was programmatically phrased as follows:

The Lega wants to put an end to the foundation of the Second Repubblica, by fighting the Palazzo of the 'affaristi' and of an unchangeable nomenclature which is directly linked with the general crime which is contaminating the entire country.<sup>171</sup>

This discourse has changed decisively. With the severe political crisis (*tangentopoli*) and the new phenomenon of thoroughly discredited political parties (at least of the governing block), the Lega has changed its strategy to present itself as the 'true alternative' to the old regime. Now, Bossi portrays his movement as a political force which is the defender of the authentic values of the democratic system. Even before the actual decision to enter government new key words had penetrated the campaigns and public declarations of the Lega: responsibility, democratic rules and authority of the institutions (of the state). What has emerged lately as a new kind of political identity is an image of an organization fighting against a 'pseudo'- democratic order which is portrayed as being occupied by the corrupt and

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<sup>171</sup> In 'Un nuova risorgimento', *ibid.*

the incompetent. The reorganization of the state according to federal principles is still the general and "revolutionary" goal. Now, however, this guiding idea is presented not as an irreconcilable opposition to the present but in harmony and correspondence with the democratic ideas that are legitimizing the political system of the country. In this context the Lega has adopted a thorough reformist approach that is basically acceptable to its coalition partners in its institutional implications. This has meant a strategic shift in the Lega's political fight and a noteworthy de-radicalization of its declared goals. As the first substantial fights within the Lega indicate, this has contributed to an internal polarization and the resulting split within the Lega between Bossi's 'governmental' line and the more radical options favored by the *puri e duri* (the 'pure and hard ones') most notably led by G. Miglio.

The consequences of this shift from a 'system opposition' to a potential coalition partner of the established major parties on the Lega's mobilization effort are crucial. Since it is a defining feature of the political identity of the Lega to present itself as the 'advocate of the small people' vis-à-vis the Roman bureaucracy, it is vital for this organization not to become identified with the power structures of the Italian capital. To maintain its credibility the Lega is hence constantly engaged in emphasizing its difference from and its opposition to traditional parties. However, it is obvious that the more the Lega collaborates with the established parties, and the more it takes political responsibility on a communal and even national level - a development that has culminated with participation in national government - the less manifest and credible is this claimed antagonism. The anti-elitist drive, constitutive for populist mobilization, is decreasingly plausible.

d. The rapprochement to the traditional parties and to the center of political power has had and will have further significant repercussions on the definition of the collective identity of the Lega. Territorial politics owes much of its ideological appeal to evoking feelings of communal belonging and harmonious integration into such an identifiable community. As Allievi shows in the case of the Lega one key concept of the Lega campaigns is "liberty" understood in close relationship to the indigenous community. The notion of liberty is formulated explicitly in opposition to class based social struggle and establishes a political agenda whose critical point of reference is not a particular social group but the 'own people'. The 'statuto della Lega Autonomista Lombarda' from September 1983 gives a clear idea of this:

The Lega Autonomista Lombarda is the political movement dedicated to realizing the aspirations of liberty coming from within the Lombard people despite the existing diverse class reality.

Or:

Today we are asking the Lombards to join our fight against a supreme value as liberty without which we cannot be from the right nor from the left but only bound to the arbitrary will of the Roman colonizer.<sup>172</sup>

However, the unspecific and vague character of this appeal - besides explaining the great attraction of territorial politics - is also the inherent weakness of movements built on this agenda. In evident contrast to the political practice of the established mass parties, new territorial movements represent a political approach that owes its attraction to the fact that it ideologically goes beyond a mere technocratic administration of public affairs. In this respect territorial movements run against the trend in Western societies described as the 'end of ideology'. Their political approach becomes partly so successful because it evokes a notion of self-determination and solidarity as principles opposing the given social and political reality. However, the less committed they are to single political projects, and the further away from the positions at which concrete decisions have to be taken, the greater is the attraction for an electorate often disappointed with the established parties and the 'political class'.

Against this background the consequences of a gradual integration and institutionalization of these political movements become comprehensible. This is particularly manifest in the case of the Lega. This movement is characterized by the coexistence of a highly emotional reference to notions such as liberty and self-determination on the one hand and very pragmatic goals on the other. With its proceeding integration the Lega faces the threat that the idea of the community as a superior reference point of social and political integration might lose its 'utopian energy'. The aspect of class, or at least of clashing interests among the people, again becomes salient and threatens to contradict the notion of the political supremacy of belonging to the territorially defined collectivity. With their adaption to the 'rules of the game' these political movements have to prove in which way their fight against outer domination, and their general claim of realizing liberty and autonomy for the community, can be translated into a concrete design for political change.

e. Another related critical point challenging the Lega's mobilization is rooted in the Lega's pivotal claim of being radically different from the practices conducted by the traditional Italian parties. Given its image of being the party backing the operation *mani pulite* and the juridical investigations against well known politicians, the suspicion that it is itself involved in the bribe-based system must have disastrous consequences for its credibility. In spring 1994

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<sup>172</sup> In: Lombardia Autonomista, no.29, April 1985.

the Lega was accused of having taken 200 million. Lire from the business consortium Montedison. Being aware of the explosive meaning this would have for the Italian public, Bossi deliberately sought to ridicule the financial support for his organization. Regardless of the actual performance of Lega politicians, the sight of Bossi being interrogated by Di Pietro in public symbolically had serious political implications. (Di Pietro is one of the most prominent judges fighting the 'crusade' against corrupt politicians who are predominantly from the PSI and the DC).

The exact impact of this incident on the Lega's supporters is difficult to estimate. Within the Lega, these challenges and related political difficulties have led to the first serious inner-organizational forms of opposition against Bossi. Most noteworthy in this respect is that Miglio, formerly the 'ideological head' of the Lega, left the organization after he had not been given the promised post in the Cabinet formed by Berlusconi<sup>173</sup>.

f. On a more general level and against the background of the above-mentioned points, a critical challenge to the Lega's mobilization can be detected in the consequences of the strategic change of its collective identity itself. In order to inaugurate a new cycle of mobilization, reacting to new political opportunities, the Lega has decided to downplay its distinct reference to the northern community, using it primarily as a *chiffre* for a particular value orientation. On the one hand, this opens up the possibility of spreading towards the south and to nationally attract political support. On the other hand, however, this step jeopardized the very source of the Lega's ideological attraction, i.e. the territorial imperative with which the Lega originally shaped the public discourse, in which its critique of the country's political establishment was embedded and by which it demarcated itself from the traditional parties and their political agendas. After dropping essential parts of its territorial identity, for a certain time the Lega could preserve its charisma by presenting itself as the only 'revolutionary force' in Italian politics. On these grounds, however, the Lega has become vulnerable to claims of new competing political forces. The Lega is increasingly perceived as an organization operating at the same level as all the other parties. Its charisma as a territorially based political agent beyond the mundane bargaining of 'normal politics' and equipped with the notion of a non-negotiable identity as the basis for its engagement is a matter of the past.

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<sup>173</sup> As a kind of revenge, his first activity was to meet Di Pietro and to announce that the 200 mill. Lire were just the first instalment and that the money was in fact not stolen as claimed by Bossi and his cashier.

These dilemmas and problems have contributed to stagnating features of the Lega's political mobilization. In political terms the rise of the new political formation, namely Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*, has brought to an end the steady rise of the Lega in Italian politics. The new figure in Italian politics successfully capitalized on those patterns on which the Lega had built its new political identity. The leader of *Forza Italia* effectively mixes anti-party and anti-establishment sentiments, genuine themes of the Lega's campaigns, with the populist promise for economic recovery (promise of one million jobs within two years). In a peculiar way in his campaigns Berlusconi combines the need for profound change with the latent desire in the Italian public for stability. On the one hand, he evidently convincingly claimed with his *Forza Italia* clubs to represent the forces alive in civil society against the arrogance of established politicians. The crux of his campaigns was to polemically contrast the managerial virtues emblematically represented by himself as one of the most successful businessmen in Italy with the corruption and inefficiency of the traditional political elite. In spite of his former close relationship to the PSI headed by Craxi, the incarnation of *tangentopoli*, and his entanglement in the secret lodge P2, Berlusconi sold his political organization as the true renovating force which would introduce modern European standards to Italy. *Forza Italia* also embodies the claim to end the political turbulence faced by the Italian political system with the corruption scandals<sup>174</sup>. Berlusconi stands for the promise of 'normality' under the impression of the tempest of *tangentopoli*. In greater detail, the political project of the Lega has been particularly vulnerable to the rise of *Forza Italia* because of the following aspects:

- As a successful self-made man and a political organization committed to the market Berlusconi attracted those social strata formerly mostly inclined to vote for the Lega: small business men, self-employed craftsmen, shopkeepers, etc. Even if coming from big business, Berlusconi effectively claims to represent the 'productive strata' whose political advocate the Lega declares to be and whose work ethic forms a critical element of its integrating collective identity. Although standing for a powerful industrial consortium Berlusconi is not easily identifiable with the semi-state companies vigorously attacked by the Lega in the name of small and medium-seize industry.
- Furthermore, Berlusconi took as his main point in his critique of state politics the tax

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<sup>174</sup> Along these lines some in fact argue that the changes of the years since 1992 have not led to the establishment of the Second Republic but rather that the reforms can be interpreted as a subtle, but successful attempt to stabilize fundamental power structures in Italian society (see: Abse 1993).

system, i.e. exactly the agenda the Lega had been emphasizing in this period. The more the Lega picked a socio-economically shaped political identity, the more it became vulnerable to a political force which articulated the widespread dissatisfaction with public services and the bureaucratic system. With its Thatcherite market ideology and anti-tax campaigns *Forza Italia* was able to tap those productive strata not employed in big state enterprises that until then made up the genuine constituency of the Lega.

- Closely related to the social groups potentially close to *Forza Italia* is the programmatic correspondence between the two new forces in Italian politics. Like the Lega, Berlusconi puts emphasis on privatization and, in more general terms, on an anti-state position, including a severe critique of the bureaucracy. Moreover, with his claimed managerial competence, Berlusconi was able to present itself as the promising solution to Italy's urgent economic problems. *Forza Italia* and the Lega have a strict market orientation of a Thatcherite style in common; this programmatic point is in fact the very basis on which the '*polo della libertà*' is formed.

- Another crucial point in *Forza Italia*'s challenge to the Lega is indubitably Berlusconi's privileged access to the mass media and hence to public discourse. Here, two coexistent developments are decisive: firstly, the Lega has gradually lost its character as a new and provocative player on the political scene and hence the primary media attention. Inevitably the Lega has fallen victim to the logic of rapidly shifting public interest. Secondly, Berlusconi does not only know how to effectively use the media for his purposes he personally disposes of the most influential media consortium in Italy (*Fininvest*). With his control of three television channels he has become the main agenda setter in recent political debate, displacing the Lega in this respect.

## 7.7. Summary and Perspectives

The Lega is not a uniform and stable political actor. Within the more than ten years of its existence it has changed its political identity substantially. To a large degree, the Lega's success is due to its capacity to effectively react to the changing political opportunities and to change its political discourse and tactics accordingly. Thus, a development was initiated in the course of which the northern leagues exceeded their initial localist character, and eventually expanded to a nationally operating political force. Under its charismatic leader, Umberto Bossi, in the 1990s the Lega became a stable political agent in a political system

increasingly in crisis, explicitly striving for national power and basing its aspirations on a platform for institutional change on a national level. The Lega's political mobilization is characterized by features of substantial change by which distinct phases are generated, indicating the respective political opportunities and the related strategic orientation. Most important in the development of the Lega is the gradual weakening of a regionalist agenda with its related political goals.

At the core of the Lega's outstanding electoral success lies the effective combination of two features both determinant for its political identity. On the one hand, particularly in its formative period, the Lega based its attraction on a strong and symbolically dispersed territorial identity. Initially, this image of collective collective identity was predominantly framed around the claimed incompatibility between the advanced north and the *mezzogiorno*, and basically reproduced features of traditional regionalism. With the adoption of broader political goals, however, this reference to a marked territory with distinct cultural features was formulated more as a conflict between the honest and hard working citizens versus the "corrupt" politicians in Rome. This belonging to a foremost culturally designated community was critical in the process of mobilization. It provided the legitimating resources for the wider political claims as it was the polarizing vehicle through which the political establishment was challenged by a new political agenda.

This is where the second important reference point in the Lega's political identity comes in. With its growing electoral success and against the background of the accelerating crisis in the Italian political system, the Lega impersonates the populist protest against the discredited political establishment of the country. Before entering the governing coalition under Berlusconi the Lega presented itself as the radical opposition against all established political institutions and parties in Rome. Its claims were intensively portrayed as the political voice of civil society revolting against the bankrupt "political class". In this, the principle of territoriality was no longer determinant for the Lega's political agenda. The communal feeling, the rootedness in a particular 'value community', was a decisive reference point in spurring the protest and in offering a viable prospect of political change with the related political goals (decentralization, federalism). However, being primarily used as a 'tool kit' for stimulating political mobilization, the principle of territoriality no longer determines the agenda of the Lega's political discourse. Rather, it became the general reference point for a communally held value orientation beyond primordial standards without determining concrete political options.

The flexibility in adopting changing political orientations and cooperating with different allies became possible because of the very nature of the Lega's collective identity which underlies and legitimates its protest. The structural restrictions on political mobilization normally to be found in the case of regionalism did not impede the rise of the Lega. Its demarcating boundaries, its main integrating codes, are delineated in such a flexible way that a broad range of political goals can be legitimated and a very widely defined constituency can potentially be included into its political project<sup>175</sup>. It is this - on principle - openness in terms of its delineating boundaries and constitutive elements of its collective identity that has allowed the Lega's development from a politically negated folklorist movement in Lombardy to the junior partner in national government.

Regarding its contemporary situation with some major strategic political decisions the Lega is, however, jeopardizing the very essence of its success. The main difficulty in the Lega's effort to sustain its mobilization can be traced back to a critical redefinition of its integrating collective identity: Firstly, the northern leagues have gradually weakened their formerly constitutive territorial reference. The demarcating boundaries have become decreasingly rigid, a formerly important indigenous local culture was abandoned as a defining mark of ideological reference. This strategic decision, motivated by newly emerging political opportunities, has had serious repercussions on the Lega's mobilizing efforts. Weakening the antagonism between the northern regions and the Roman center essentially undermines the plausibility of a political project based on a distinctive notion of cultural superiority. If there are no clear-cut dividing lines between the 'sacred' and the 'profane', the periphery and the center, the missionary crusade as the constitutive element of the cultural collective identity, threatens to lose its reference point.

Secondly, the step has been performed from a non-committal populist protest, characterized by a radical anti-institutional stand, to a political force of government. The *raison d'être* of populist movements, their irreconcilable and popular protest against the establishment and elite of a country, has lost much of its mobilizing base. Both developments have allowed the Lega's collective identity to instigate a broader and more far-reaching political mobilization, as - in a more advanced stage of its mobilization - they have simultaneously become the source of the Lega's first electoral set-back. In a way, the dynamic of the Lega's constitutive collective identity layed out the patterns for the puzzle how to

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<sup>175</sup> See on this point the more comprehensive discussion in the chapter on the comparison between the two case studies.

further sustain its mobilization.

To adequately understand the challenge that is involved the institutionalization it is instructive to recall the nature of the cultural form of collective identity. Its integrating codes are essentially based on the explicit demarcation from the 'Non-We'<sup>176</sup>. Their legitimating resources are hence critically dependent on the plausibility of an image which contrasts the own superiority with the deficiencies of those excluded from the culturally assigned community. In the case of the Lega these forms of aggressive demarcation have gradually lost their mobilizing effects. At an earlier stage, Bossi's organization productively replaced the negative notion of southerners and immigrants by the national parties and politicians as their 'enemy' in political terms. Each direction of enemy construction was conducive to a particular stage of the Lega's mobilization with its specific political opportunities: Initially the polemic demarcation from the south served to fabricate and politicize the collective identity of the northern regions. With the broadening of its political aspirations the Lega widely abandoned its stress on the dividing line of Italian society. Instead Third World immigrants were used to belligerently confront what was portrayed as 'alien' to the wider northern community. Subsequently, the image of the 'enemy' changed towards the representatives of the Roman nomenclature, underpinning the Lega's role as a populist protest against the nation-state center. With the rapprochement to Roman institutions and with the rise of other new political forces, however, this latest reference point in constructing its own identity has become increasingly ineffectual. Not being based on procedural rules for the community's internal organization as its civic counterpart, the mobilizing energy of cultural forms of collective identities rely on the articulate boundaries to the 'Other'.

With its newest advancement to the established political structures the Lega faces the well-known dilemma of any populist movement: either it must give up its radical opposition to the political system and hence endanger the very essence of its political identity or it must refuse any political responsibility, thus risking failure because of the resulting political impotence. With the growing cooperation with established parties or even in an institutionalized alliance, populist actors tend to make their intransigent protest against established elites less and less credible. This difficulty can be identified at the core of the Lega's continuous refusal to formulate clear conceptual schema for political change, for the unbroken vagueness of its program and the constantly reaffirmed claim to present the only

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<sup>176</sup> This point refers to the idealtypic distinction of forms of collective identity (5.3.2.) and the specific mode by which a cultural collective identity is primarily integrated via the distinct demarcation from the 'other'.

radical opposition against the established nation-state elite. The longer the Lega has been capable of maintaining a position of uncommitted opposition to the established structures of power, the longer its crucial image of a political force of the 'people' opposing elite politics was credible. The rejection of concrete political responsibility has allowed the Lega to capitalize on the widespread and yet diffuse dissatisfaction with the 'political class'. With the eventual increase in electoral support, Bossi faced two possibilities, neither very promising for the further prospect of an enhanced mobilization: either to commit himself to a coalition which obliges the Lega to support unpopular state politics and to change its focus of activity to state institutions or to become isolated and hence politically meaningless in a form of unconditional opposition. Bossi's still ambivalent attitude towards Berlusconi is an expression of this stalemate.

Having accepted the alliance with *Forza Italia* and *Alleanza Nazionale* the Lega hence has manoeuvred itself into another unpleasant option regarding its future political role. The resultant alternative is either to commit itself firmly to a government under Berlusconi and to advance limited change towards federalism. Being aware of the 'revolutionary transformation' of the system announced by the Lega, this pragmatic turn involves the threat of a growing estrangement between the '*popolo leghista*' and its representatives in Parliament. The other feasible option is to maintain the role of a basically radical anti-institutional opposition or even return to the roots of a regionalist force from the north. Neither of these options conditioned by the prior choice to cooperate with Berlusconi is, however, promising regarding the prospect of sustaining political mobilization.

The latest results from 1994's general elections seem to confirm this not very attractive alternative for the Lega. Having been excluded by Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* in that the two parties shared the protest vote against the traditional parties, the Lega was mainly supported by its traditional constituency in Lombardy and Veneto. What becomes feasible is a return to a more outspoken territorial identity with the consequence of basically following again more closely the pattern of typical regional mobilization. This would mean returning to its roots, namely a collective identity by a territorially framed difference and cultural distinctiveness. The second alternative would be further abandoning its territorial identity and looking for a programmatic orientation as a new mass party in the political center of the Italian spectrum. The polarization within the Lega Nord between different factions no longer unconditionally loyal to Bossi is a vivid expression of this fundamental decision.

A decisive factor in this respect will be how the Lega uses the augmented institutional power which it disposes of as a force of government and, more specifically, with Maroni as a minister of interior. Miglio's departure indicates that the Lega does not have much time to gain a notable own political profile in the coalition with *Forza Italia* and *Alleanza Nazionale*. Internally, a critical point will be how long Bossi's charisma is able to bridge the gulf between the high expectations of the Lega's constituency and the mundane work in the national administration. Regarding its middle range political prospects the political development of the Lega in fact critically depends on the capacity of the traditional political center to re-consolidate itself. The dynamic of the radically restructured party system in Italy will determine the margins for the political future of the Lega as an established mass party.

## Chapter VIII

### South Tyrol: Features of Crisis in a Primordially Integrated Community

#### 8.1. Introduction

The type of territorial politics in South Tyrol is distinct from the 'communitarian populism' to be found in the case of the Lega. The two political actors have played a radically different role in Italian politics. This is shown in how the respective mobilization of the two territorial movements have reacted to the current crisis in Italian politics. Inaccurately, in both mainstream political and academic discourse, two phenomena with manifestly dissimilar mobilization patterns are regularly united under the label 'regionalism'. If the guiding hypothesis of this thesis holds, then their respective roles in and impact on the macro-political level becomes comprehensible by pointing to the resources and political options that become available by the nature of their adopted integrating collective identity. Their performance as macro agents must become explainable by the particular dynamic patterns of political mobilization generated on the basis of the specific collective identity. The collective identities' respective integrating codes define in how far both collective actors are able to successfully launch their identity project and effectively react to the particular opportunity structure in Italian politics.

A first reading of the South Tyrolian case indicates its basically different political identity. South Tyrol and the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (SVP) are, in terms of their political strength and achievements, an outstanding example of the success of a regionalist force. In the case of the Alps region, a strong culturally reproduced attachment to a territorial entity has effectively concurred with strong features of ethnic identification<sup>1</sup>. The result has been an outstanding persistence of an ethnically framed collective identity and a related process of political mobilization. Since the end of the Second World War the 'People's Party' has been able to attract almost the entire support of the German<sup>2</sup> and Ladin community by claiming that it defends its minority rights. The political arrangements with the Italian government, finally agreed upon by the Roman parliament in 1988, and approved by the South Tyrolean representatives in 1992 after decades of conflictual negotiations, have come to be seen as the

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<sup>1</sup> See on this point the empirical studies of Gubert (1976, 1988) and Gogoli et al. (1979) that shed light on the comparatively successful reproduction of ethnically conceived forms of territorial belonging.

<sup>2</sup> Although defining themselves as part of the Tyrolian nation, the non-Italian community, due to its language, is referred to as 'German'.

exemplary case of successful regional integration in Europe<sup>3</sup>.

Attaining regularly the absolute majority of votes in the provincial parliament, the SVP has hardly been contested in its domination of the political scene in South Tyrol. In the decades since the World War, the regionalist party has basically preserved its political identity, which was set by the all overshadowing concern to defend the rights of the linguistic minority against the contentious claims of the Roman government. Due to its articulated collective identity and the related interests of its constituency, defined by the classical regionalist agenda, the SVP survived the major socio-economic changes of the region unchallenged (Leidlmaier 1987). Notwithstanding minor radicalized splinter groups, the profound modernization of South Tyrol did not encourage a competing political force. Despite this region's transformation from a backward agrarian to a modern society, in the political sphere the SVP could effectively defend its hegemonic political position amongst the German and Ladin-speaking population.

The recent broad contractual agreement (the so-called *Paketabschluss*) now, however, marks a threshold in the SVP's gradually growing problems in sustaining its integrative capacity. Its political success threatens to undermine the rationale of its monopoly of political representation. Until recently this regionalist party could successfully claim to embody the only legitimate political voice of the German community. With the institutional arrangement the so far all dominating agenda of the German-Italian conflict has lost parts of its weight and new issues have come up. The hypothesis in investigating this case is that in a long-term perspective the social mechanisms that traditionally have worked to reproduce the ethnically conceived collective identity and which hence are the very basis of SVP's engagement have become spurious. In order to better grasp the problems that the SVP face in sustaining its hegemonic model, it is necessary to analyze in depth the nature of the collective identity to be found in South Tyrol. This perspective gives the key to an explanation of the success of the 'People's Party' and thus it provides the analytical tools to shed light on the deep rooted reasons for its first serious political set-backs in the early 1990s.

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<sup>3</sup> See: G. Mumelter, 'Eine Autonomie mit Modellcharakter für Europa', in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, October 18, 1994.

## 8.2. The National 'Gemeinschaft'

Historically, South Tyrol can be seen as an outstanding example of the preponderance of the nation-state's interest over the claims of the impotent territorial community, as the typical case of a failed and in its features highly conflictual integration of a region into a nation-state. The mostly German-speaking region in the Alps has suffered in the twentieth century from the classic patterns that form the very basis of the center-periphery conflict. Due to the nation-state's power struggles and bargaining processes on the international scene, in this century South Tyrol became subject to the imperialistic aspirations of Italy. With regard to the fascist period in Italian history it is not exaggerated to speak about a form of 'internal colonialism' (Freiberg 1989). This means a systematic attempt by the nation-state's center to culturally homogenize regional societies and to dictate their political fate. Since its enforced integration into the Italian nation-state in 1919, the story of this region has been one of continual suppression and struggle for self-determination. Founded immediately after the war in 1945, the SVP's political identity is determined by the traumatic experiences of the preceding historic period and the challenges raised by the new international constellation regarding the future of South Tyrol.

The entire political culture of South Tyrol is shaped accordingly. Particularly for the elder generations the fight for independence and against the occupying forces has become the decisive element in both their individual and collective identity. Being part of the German community meant a particular way of lifeworld integration and political socialization. Commonly shared religious practices, traditions, the immediate belonging to a language community, the centrality of the local life in the village, and the simple identification of enemies facilitated the reproduction of an ethnically shaped group consciousness. On this basis a primordial sanctioned form of ethnicity could survive as a principally uncontested integrating ideology. The reference to the indigenous culture and language, its continual defense against the attempts to 'Italianize' the region, shaped almost all aspects of social life. After World War II, education, employment, culture and the local administration became subject to constant struggle over ethnically defined group entitlements. In this construction of a legitimating collective identity, the notion of community and language are closely interrelated. The community is meant to exist as a prior entity and to give identity to individuals, i.e., to sustain the traditional regional features of citizenry. By its communal belonging the individual is expected to speak the language, promote its development, defend houses, jobs and the community's resources because only thus will the community survive

and the language be maintained. Correspondingly, the entire postwar political life has been shaped by the antagonism between Italy, represented by the Roman government and the Italian community living in South Tyrol, and the 'German' population. South Tyrol can indeed be seen as an exemplary type of an internally divided national society.

### 8.2.2. An Excursion into History: the Suppressed Minority

A commonly shared past with strong focal points of identification is one of the most effective constituents of a collective identity. It forms a sense of shared descent and destiny. The reference to history provides the symbolic and ritual resources by the help of which the demarcation from the 'Non-We' is made manifest and a viable in-group feeling is generated. The boundaries of the community become an undisputed actuality and a stable pattern of an accordingly organized socialization for the young generations can be cultivated. On political grounds, narrations about the past of a certain community are able to furnish potent incentives to act, transcending individual goals<sup>4</sup>. These features of a common duty formulated on the basis of the assigned community's past and tradition lies at the very core of any nationalist ideology (Anderson 1983; Smith 1989, Elkar 1981). Nash formulates this critical role as follows:

Tradition is the past of a culture, as that past is thought to have continuity, a presence, and a future. These features of tradition bestow upon the past a weight of authority; the very fact of survival, pastness, and continuity give an aura of authority, legitimacy, and rightness to cultural beliefs and practices. (Nash 1989:14)

In the case of South Tyrol, the sorrowful fight for survival and self-determination that has shaped the last two centuries is in fact an outstanding example of the salience of historic narratives in contemporary political controversies<sup>5</sup>. The continuous onslaught on the Alps region's sovereignty, first by the Bavarians and then by the Italian nation-state, is still prominently alive in collective memory. This past is omnipresent in public discourse and makes up the cornerstone of the people's collective identity. Names such as that of the

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<sup>4</sup> See: Angehrn (1985); Hobsbawm, Eric, 'Die Erfindung der Vergangenheit', in: *Die Zeit*, No.37, September 9, 1994, p.49-50.

<sup>5</sup> There are prominent examples of such vivid and shaping discussions of the past: Thaler (1988), Volgger (1984), Gatterer (1982).

nineteenth century freedom fighter, Andreas Hofer<sup>6</sup>, or Tolomei, Mussolini's representative in South Tyrol responsible for the Italianization programs, as well as events such as the *Option* or the *Paket*<sup>7</sup> significantly shape contemporary public discourse. Although the existential conflict has been transformed into its 'civilized' institutional form, the reference to the past and the endured sufferance form a key element in the political identity of the German population. The memory is preserved and as a highly emotional issue it is easy to mobilize for polarizing political purposes<sup>8</sup>.

More precisely, the following main features can be described as determinant for the generation of the German community's collective identity:

- a. The open repressive 'Italianization' conducted by the fascist regime; or, more subtly, the continuous threat of a gradual assimilation into the Italian nation-state.
- b. The more or less restrained right for political self-determination given by outside domination or the mandatory integration into the Italian nation-state.
- c. The strong sense of belonging to the historic Tyrolian community and the related close relationship with Austrian North Tyrol.

#### 8.2.2.1. a. *The fight against cultural domination*

The critical starting point of the history of South Tyrol is the peace treaty of *Saint Germain* and the international agreements made after the First World War. With the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, South Tyrol became part of the Italian kingdom with which, in socio-cultural terms, it historically shared almost nothing but the Catholic religion. Culturally, especially with regard to the language this region was integrated into a nation-state that was alien to local communal life. During the earlier occupation by the Bavarians there were at least some basic cultural affinities and the fight against the invader

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<sup>6</sup> See on the historic role of A. Hofer and its symbolic use in the formation of the Tyrolian collective identity: Cole 1994.

<sup>7</sup> The 'package' agreement was originally signed in 1969 and consists of 137 measures designed to give substance to the autonomy status of South Tyrol. It grants competencies to the 'autonomous province Bozen-Südtirol' that other Italian regions do not enjoy. Until the late 1980s the political fight between the German minority and the Italian nation-state was about the concrete realization of these regulations. The last disputes in this 'never-ending' story could be settled in 1988 with far reaching concessions to the regional aspirations. From the German side the final approval came in 1992 agreed upon on an extraordinary congress of the SVP in Meran.

<sup>8</sup> A monument with a still polarizing power is the *Siegesdenkmal* (victory monument), erected in the center of Bozen by Mussolini to celebrate the annexation of South Tyrol by Italy in 1919. Especially for the more radical fraction of the regionalist forces, this fascist memorial is seen as a humiliation of South Tyrol (its abolition is still a primary concern of the *Heimatbund's* political programme).

was directed against the nature of the implanted administrative system. The situation at the end of the First World War, however, was one in which two entirely different societies were united in one nation-state by the results of the power struggle on the international scene.

The rising fascist regime totally unwilling to respect the relative independence and cultural difference of the German minority in the north. Subsequently realized in the 1920s and 1930s, Mussolini's fascists conducted a three-step strategy in displacing the German population: de-nationalization, settlement of the Italian people in South Tyrol and finally the systematic expulsion of the reluctant German-speaking population (Gruber 1975, Steuerer 1980). The politics of the methodical Italianization of the region conducted under Mussolini's reign were a chain of traumatic experiences, which formed the collective identity of the South Tyrolian people. Tolomei, founder of the notorious *Archivio per Alto Adige*, was responsible for the Italian attempt to totally eradicate any German origins. This was done by either making the non-Italians subject to a radical program of cultural 're-education' or by expatriating South Tyrol's population of German descent (the famous 'option' in 1939<sup>9</sup>). Laws were enacted that were carefully directed at enforcing a comprehensive denationalization in each sector of the society. On a political level, each form of local self-administration was abolished and replaced by a direct control by the Italian nation-state.

Claiming South Tyrol as an authentic part of the Italian nation-state, Mussolini's envoy introduced a systematic plan for eliminating the German heritage. Italian became the official language in administration and in the educational system; the use of the German language even became punishable. The German names of villages, streets, and even of families were, according to the rules stipulated in Tolomei's archive, Italianized. South Tyrol became *Alto Adige* and the German peasant Josef became Guiseppe (even German names on gravestones were changed)<sup>10</sup>. After diverse measures did not succeed in thoroughly displacing the indigenous German roots, this operation found its most extreme form in the plan to expel the German population. The indigenous German inhabitants were given the 'option' of either declaring themselves *Volksdeutsche* (belonging to the German people) and returning to Hitler's *Reich* or of accepting total conversion into Italian citizens with all the consequences

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<sup>9</sup> On this arrangement between Mussolini and Hitler to Italianize South Tyrol and transfer the Germans into the German Reich and what it meant for the German community in the North of Italy see: Messner (1989).

<sup>10</sup> See on the process of Italianization: Kramer (1981, particularly 163ff.). His work on the status of the two main competing languages in South Tyrol impressively shows how the 'scientific' *Toponomastik* (science of town names) was manifestly used for political purposes by both social groups.

for their personal and collective identity<sup>11</sup>. This decision created profound conflict amongst a people that at this time was predominantly living in a rural environment and was culturally shaped by the isolation and tradition of its local society. The split between those willing to stay and those preferring Hitler's domain, divided friends and families. The ethnically defined collective identity became a matter of an existential contention. A predominantly premodern society and its citizens were forced to decide on the fate of their existence, based on ethnically framed patterns of belonging that until then had simply been an uncontested fact of life.

As in other historic examples, this policy of oppression, however, strengthened rather than eradicated the collective identity, the strong attachment to the German community and language. Secret school meetings were organized in farm-houses and in the mountains (the so-called "Katakombenschulen"; Villgrater 1984). German material was smuggled from Germany and Austria into South Tyrol and the hidden use of the mother-language became a spontaneous and widely practiced form of resistance<sup>12</sup>. This resistance to the irredentist aspirations of Mussolini's government were substantially supported by German and Austrian associations active in the preservation of the *Deutsches Volkstum* (German national identity) (Weik 1989). Oppression generated an environment in which the threatened ethnic identity was the reference point in the generation of strong collective identity patterns and, at this stage, in a rudimentary political fight for self-preservation.

The results of the Italianization process shaped the socio-cultural environment of the postwar order and constituted the latent conflict between the different minority groups of the population in Alto Adige (the Italian, German and Ladin community). Numerically, the fascist actions raised the proportion of the Italian population to one third of the total inhabitants (See table below). Due to the traditional social composition of the South Tyrolian population and due to the efforts of the Roman government to industrialize the Italian-dominated Bolzano, these Italians were mostly employed in the secondary sector of the regional economy, entirely dominating the new industrial sites installed around Bozen. At the end of the war the non-Italian population did not dispose of a working class or unions, nor of a staff of civil servants

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<sup>11</sup> Amongst those living in the province, Bolzano, 211.799 voted for Germany and the remaining 34.237 preferred Italian citizenship. Due to the turbulence of the war and different forms of civil disobedience only about 75000 people were resettled amongst whom, however, was the elite from the industrial and tourist sector of South Tyrol's economy.

<sup>12</sup> See on these forms of clandestine opposition against the Italianization measures: Vogglar (1984); particularly: 'Ein polizeibekanntes Gesicht', p.40ff.

or teachers. Almost entirely, these principle social functions were undertaken by the Italian 'immigrants'. The German population, at least in the first two decades of the postwar era, basically remained in the rural provinces of South Tyrol, resulting in a severe socio-economic disadvantage vis-à-vis the newcomers (Markusse 1991). The traditional composition of the local workforce as well as the nation state's policy supporting industrialization under the lead of Italians resulted in a specific division of labor along ethnic lines<sup>13</sup>. Already on these grounds the seeds for conflict between the two potent lingual groups were sown.

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**Result of censuses: Lingual groups amongst the total population in South Tyrol**

Year	Germans (%)	Italians (%)	Ladins (%)	Total
1900	190.189 (91.4)	8.621 ( 4.1)	8.907 (4.3)	207.983
1910	213.352 (92.2)	7.054 ( 3.0)	9.453 (4.0)	233.459
1921	190.211 (84.4)	26.842 (11.4)	9.910 (4.2)	235.963
1961	232.717 (62.9)	128.271 (34.3)	12.594 (3.4)	373.863
1971	260.351 (62.9)	137.759 (33.0)	15.456 (3.7)	414.041
1981	279.544 (64.9)	123.695 (28.7)	17.736 (4.1)	430.568
1991	287.303 (67.9)	116.914 (27.6)	18.434 (4.4)	433.620

Source: Südtiroler Landesregierung (ed.) Südtirol Handbuch 1987 and 1993, Bolzano.

Besides the socio-structural disadvantages, and perhaps more importantly for the political fate of the region, the years of fascist terror remained decisive in the collective memory of the German population in South Tyrol. There were repeated symbolic actions against the fascist monuments erected in the region's capital<sup>14</sup>, and the enforced Italian language and names became key elements in the political mobilization of the indigenous inhabitants. For the generations that were socialized during and shortly after the war, the anti-Italian attitude constituted the key element of the collective identity and the related political aspirations of the Germans. After the enforced attempt to 'Italianize' South Tyrol the German

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<sup>13</sup> Next to the industrial sector, public administration was the occupational sphere in which the German-speaking population was numerically largely under-represented. See on the more recent employment structure among the language groups in different economic branches: Pallaver (1990: 71)

<sup>14</sup> How much the future of the fascist victory monument in Bozen still shapes public discourse is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that since 1991, after a violent clash between the MSI and the Schützen about the fascist symbol of triumph, there has been a permanent commission working on this issue in the provincial parliament. The *Freiheitlichen* made this question one of the key points of their political campaign in November 1993, promising to pull down the monument in the case of electoral victory.

language became more than just a taken-for-granted medium of communication. It became the object of a political fight about the collective identity.

In more general terms, the collective identity of the German-speaking population has had one critical constant factor which shaped the consciousness of this ethnic group until today. This is the fear of what Mussolini called the 'death march' of the Germans in South Tyrol. Often cited by German politicians in South Tyrol this verdict of Mussolini has been reframed as the continuous danger of losing the ethnic identity with whose help the language community was able to survive in the past. The notion of a permanent collective jeopardy became the most stable feature in public discourse. Justifying its own political claims the political representatives of the German community portray South Tyrol, notwithstanding the contractual guarantees from the Italian nation-state, as suffering under a still pertinent peril of ethnic extinction. What is pointed to here is not immediate existential intimidation but the subversion of the identity as a people. At risk is, as one interviewee formulated it, "what holds everything together", i.e., the uncontested belonging to the German identity community.

#### **8.2.2.2. b. *The neglected political right for self-determination***

The De Gasperi-Gruber Agreement of September 1946 set the legal framework of postwar politics in South Tyrol. This agreement provided the grounds on which the autonomy statute for the region 'Trentino-Alto Adige' from February 1948 was based. The applied regulations, however, were perceived by the German population and its political representatives as a clear violation of their right for political self-determination. First of all, the integration of Alto Adige into the administrative unit with Trentino was judged as a prolongation of the principle of foreign rule. In spite of the 'special status' political rights granted to the region, the nature of this administrative unit created a situation where the Italian population had the numerical majority and hence there was the potential 'Italian domination'. The 'Landtag' (the provincial council) in South Tyrol was given only highly limited competence in the era of the local economy, whereas the key decisions concerning the development of the region became part of the legislative power of the regional and national parliaments. The campaigns under the slogan 'Los von Trient' (Detached from Trentino) were, in the late 1950s and 1960s, consequently a key element of the protest against the Roman government.

Furthermore, the regulations from the autonomy status were only partly realized and South Tyrol remained deprived of critical, constitutionally conceded political rights. In public awareness the language question was here high on the agenda. In the postwar period German

was practically relegated to a secondary language clearly disadvantaged vis-à-vis Italian as the official form of social communication. Only sporadic contacts with Austria's North Tyrol were allowed, and the Roman government was accused of systematically discriminating against the German population in terms of social and economic grants from the state. The dissatisfaction culminated in the early 1960s in an outburst of terrorist attacks (mostly against objects of public concern such as electricity masts), which, eventually, resulted in a new autonomy status designed to clarify and to strengthen the minority rights of the German population.

Regarding the formation of the collective identity in South Tyrol, this violent revolt against the Roman government meant a further reinforcement of the 'We feeling'. It symbolically constructed a link up with the myths of the heroic fight against outer domination. Until the late 1970s terrorist violence in fact remained an integral part of the political struggle for independence<sup>15</sup>. In this, the contemporary confrontation with the Roman government was directly linked to the past. Politically, these attacks were, apart from the actual conflict with the Italian nation-state, meant to symbolically create a continuity in the 'heroic' fight against foreign domination (the group responsible for the violent attacks in the 1960s was appropriately called '*Verband für Südtiroler Freiheitskämpfer*' South Tyrolian freedom fighters, a group that was later transformed into the *Südtiroler Heimathund*<sup>16</sup>). An imaginary legitimating bond was suggested between the national hero Andreas Hofer fighting the Bavarian domination in the early nineteenth century and those blowing up pylons of electric powerlines in South Tyrol in the 1960s, thus symbolically uniting the historic forms of political insurrection with the more recent forms of regionalist protest. Against the background of the fascist past the energy with which the Germans in South Tyrol sought to realize the principle of two equal languages also becomes comprehensible. The historical experience particularly of open suppression became a widely sanctioned determinant of politics in the region.

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<sup>15</sup> In the mid 1980s there was a new wave of terrorist attacks. In contrast to the 1960s, however, these actions were not backed by the overwhelming majority of the population. They were instead isolated onslaughts with no clear political goal (some speculate about a rightwing-Italian rather than a German background).

<sup>16</sup> This small but influential organization, originally designed as an institution assisting old 'freedom fighters', became, in the early 1980s, the intransigent advocate of a far-reaching autonomy (in union with North Tyrol) and a defender of the German '*Volkstum*' (cultural identity of the people). Its leader is the well known figure E. Klotz, the daughter of one of the most famous 'freedom fighters' of South Tyrol's history.

The continuous quarrels with the Italian government strongly contributed to the maintenance of ethnically defined lines of conflict and the public's perception of an essentially irreconcilable confrontation between the Tyrolean people and the outside 'enemy'. In fact, with the end of Mussolini's fascist regime and the agreement between Italy and Austria about the international status of South Tyrol, there was still no stable *status quo* for the region's political situation. The history of injustice remained alive and was the source of many struggles between the Italian nation-state and the German community in South Tyrol. The political reason behind the salience of this continuously polarizing conflict was Rome's systematic attempt to limit and reduce the rights of the German and Ladin community. Far from settling the conflict and providing a stable set for an approved integration into the Italian nation-state, the contested concrete design of the autonomy status until recently denoted a stationary source of conflict and political polarization.

Despite the consequently endangered status of the minority groups and the structural predominance of the Italian population in the regional policy process, the German community was able to strengthen its say in regional political affairs. Regarding the perspective applied here it is worth noting that the gradually stipulated minority rights for the German population made up a new key component in the reproduction of the collective identity. Institutional arrangements develop their own dynamic in this respect. The limited political competence and resulting institutional resources allowed for the preservation of an indigenous cultural development of South Tyrol and hence for the maintenance of the ethnically framed collective identity of the Germans (Alcock 1976). The status of the 'special region' hence constituted a social and political environment conducive to a strong communal attachment.

### **8.2.2.3. c. *The reference to the wider Tyrolian community***

A stable sense of a collective identity in South Tyrol has survived to such a forceful extent because of the relationship with its Northern Tyrolian counterpart in Austria. The cross-border unit was crucial in both a cultural and a political-institutional sense. Especially for the postwar generation the orientation towards North Tyrol and the common capital Innsbruck was indisputable. For instance, illegally during the fascist occupation and on a stable basis in recent decades the normal procedure for a student from South Tyrol has been to study on the other side of the Alps. Thus, the professional and intellectual elite has been educated and socialized in a distinct Tyrolean culture enriching its own region with the experience that they gained in their ideational homeland.

Politically, the reference to a historically authenticated 'national entity' provided critical resources for the struggle against the Italian nation-state. Through its northern counterpart the distinct collective identity of south Tyrol was prevented from culturally petrifying and was provided with a realistic scheme for its political fight<sup>17</sup>. The contradiction between the integration into a national state, perceived as an enforced administrative apparatus, and the genuine *Heimat*<sup>18</sup> has probably been the most vital source in the regionalist agenda of political mobilization<sup>19</sup>. The statements by the SVP's former charismatic leader, Magnago<sup>20</sup> should be seen in this context; they document how this alienation was framed in political discourse. At a meeting of the SVP in 1982 he said:

The South Tyrolian has a native country. Austria is the soil of our fathers with which we feel a close affinity and on which our heart is set.

And in another context:

We live in two states but we have one common *Heimat* Tyrol and with this the common native country Austria. (Cited in Ermacora 1984: 311)

To adequately appreciate this role it is important to see that the cultural confirmation of South Tyrol by its fellow Austrians was intimately linked to the political struggle for autonomy. Particularly in the immediate postwar era every meeting of music or sport clubs, not to mention political representatives of the two Tyrolean parts, had a direct political dimension<sup>21</sup>.

The official support for South Tyrol by the Austrian state was another crucial resource in the SVP's fight against the "threatening" dominance of the Italian nation-state. Sanctioned by the Paris Agreement, South Tyrol was, until the recent final agreement with the Roman

<sup>17</sup> Even recently the link with Austria is perceived as the only guarantee for the survival of the indigenous cultural identity in South Tyrol. Reflecting upon the future of the region Voggler, for example, clearly states: "We have to grow together with Tyrol north of the *Brenner*. Otherwise the roots of our *Volkstum* (people's identity) will dry up,- in spite of all the proclamations." (Vogger 1984:308)

<sup>18</sup> This German term *Heimat* is not exactly translatable. It means 'home' or 'native place', but combines in a peculiar sense a geographical reference ('place of birth') with a highly emotional notion of belonging and attachment to a collective entity.

<sup>19</sup> See on the role of North Tyrol and Austria in the SVP's political fight: Ermacora (1984; particularly: Chapter 15 'Heimat Tirol und Vaterland Österreich' (p.311ff.)

<sup>20</sup> On Magnago's role in the SVP and his decisive impact on political life in South Tyrol see: Benedikter (1983).

<sup>21</sup> Today forms of direct cooperation between the two Tyrolian regions have been established. Amongst the most important ones, on a political level, there is a regular common session of the two Parliaments, alternating between Bolzano and Innsbruck.

government, an official protectorate of Austria<sup>22</sup>. This automatically gave the question of the German minority an international dimension and hence enhanced bargaining power of the SVP vis-à-vis the Italian nation-state. Furthermore, the long-term prospect of a possible unification with its northern counterpart - even if not directly on the agenda of the SVP's program - has contributed to attributing the regionalist aspirations with a rational and realistic perspective.

Considering the role of the elements necessary for the formulation of a stable and politically highly vibrant collective identity one particularity is striking. The different sources of identity construction have remained astonishingly stable over time, although the historic political conflict, on which its elements are based, has lost much of its political weight. In the case of South Tyrol history has manifestly provided critical ideational resources for the stable reproduction of the primordially based ethnic identity. The deeply rooted perception of an ethnically defined belonging has been strong enough to survive a politically changed environment. As such the cognitive codes constituting the collective identity to be found amongst the German-speaking population was obviously strong enough to persist as the decisive base for political mobilization. In investigating this stability the hypothesis can be formulated that the political representative of the language minority, the SVP, was itself a critical agent which sustained the reproduction of these features of the primordial collective identity.

### **8.3. The 'People's Party': the claim for exclusive representation**

The strongly ethnically assigned political representation of the German population, the SVP, is a direct child of the experiences of the fascist era and the protest against the region's firm integration into the Italian nation-state. In May 1945 Erich Amonn founded the SVP out of the resistance group "*Andreas Hofer Bund*", using the infrastructure that had been established during the illegal struggle against the imperialistic fascist aspirations. The defense of the minority rights of its ethnically defined constituency was the all-dominating political aspiration of the SVP. Reflecting this primacy of a common identity in formulating the political interests of the German community, it was crucial for the 'People's Party' to claim

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<sup>22</sup> The Austrian state was, until the final ratification of the Packet and the *Streitbeilegungserklärung* (declaration about the settlement of the controversy) by Austria in 1988, the official representative of South Tyrol, for instance, in the organs of the UN.

to equally represent the citizens who belong to this constituency by birth and blood. Beyond religious, political or class cleavages a common political party was portrayed as being able to serve as a collective agent for the entire German and Ladin-speaking community in the political realm. Historically, this implicitly, and manifestly convincingly, presupposed that there was an immediate link between the primordially framed collective identity and the political preference. As a German the only feasible and legitimate choice in electorate terms was, particularly in the postwar era, the *Sammelpartei* (Unifying party)<sup>23</sup>.

The crucial integrating feature of the regionalist regime was the notion of a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (community constituted by common destiny). The fate of the individual is vitally connected with that of the community. The particular history and the perpetuated collective memory of the sufferance constitute the basis on which such a notion of an existential significance of the communal integration could flourish. It is striking that on these grounds, political divergence from the group interest is perceived as a personal betrayal. The German-speaking citizen who did not vote for the SVP (or a minor German party such as the *Heimatbund*) put him- or herself outside the symbolically and ritually clearly appointed ethnic community. Coherently, this individual became subject to the notions of aggressive exclusion with which the 'enemy' is contested in primordial forms of collective identities.

Based on such features of an all-dominant group belonging the SVP could regularly count on 90% of the votes of the German- and Ladin-speaking population in regional and national elections<sup>24</sup>. The SVP effectively used the resulting power base in the region and province to build up an institutional infrastructure capable of reproducing its collective identity and generating patterns of political loyalty. In the course of its almost fifty years of political hegemony in the province South Tyrol, on a local level the 'People's Party could establish a productive network of subsidiary associations and the party-linked political organization. Given its integral political identity as a defender of the rights of the entire German and Ladin inhabitants and its related political status, the SVP can today count on a framework of civil associations and semi-political institutions all explicitly supportive of the

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<sup>23</sup> This term, used as the key definition of the party's political identity, denotes the claim to unit all Germans in one collective actor representing its political rights. As Pfaundler, in his work on South Tyrol in 1958, enthusiastically described the SVP: "The party with great patience and the real European mind, the SVP, in which the left and the right, liberals and clericals, radicals and conservatives cooperate, in order to unanimously represent the entire people and to fight for its rights." (Pfaundler 1958: 45).

<sup>24</sup> Even today there are some communities in rural South Tyrol in which not one single vote is given to a 'non-German' party.

SVP. Partly openly supported by, partly in a form of conflictual relationship with these associations, the political representative of the German community was able to build up a viable and stable political subculture (or in Italian terms, a *sottogoverno*). With the help of a net of organizations such as the *Schützen* (marksmen), music and dance groups, *Heimatvereine* (clubs for the native culture) and associations for local costumes, the 'People's Party' could generate a stronghold in civil society by the help of which it was able to guarantee the reproduction of its founding collective identity. Its political claims were firmly embedded in this ethnically defined identity. Given the recent history of this region, belonging to the German community and supporting the SVP was strictly perceived as a closely linked expression of the commitment to the primordial collective identity.

Correspondingly, this collective identity can be seen as the main frame of reference in interpreting social and political issues. The political aspirations of the SVP, however, are not only restricted to the defense of the minority rights of the German community. The stipulated role of the 'People's Party' is more extensive. Its action are guided by the aim to reproduce the socio-cultural conditions on which the SVP's political identity is based. As its historical leader, Silvius Magnago, explicitly claimed: it is the task of the SVP to secure the cohesion of the German population, of the *Volksgruppe* (people's group)<sup>25</sup>. As a political party, Magnago carries on, the SVP should contribute to the continued reproduction of the ethnically defined collective identity. He states that political decisions should be guided by the 'meta'- or pre-political considerations of how to preserve those features which give meaning to being German. The integrating ideological notion is the image of a united front against all external threats to the indigenous German population. Beyond single political issues the constant feature of primordial belonging furnishes a stationary form of political allegiance.

Fears nourished by the collective memory formed in the fascist period and the continuously conflictual relationship with the Italian government have formed the political environment in which the SVP was able to stabilize its political consensus. The more the rights of the German community were perceived as threatened and discriminated against, the more solid the support for the SVP. Times of enhanced polarization, expressed by the terrorist attacks in the 1960s, reaffirmed the strict alignment between ethnic affiliation and political alignment.

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<sup>25</sup> Interview in: *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 28.3.77.

The political orientation, developed on the basis of the clearly conceived pattern of collective identity, is straightforward. Their self-definition as the *Sammelpartei* ('unifying party') alludes to the criteria referring making membership possible. The SVP claims to unite the German population, beyond any class or ideological differences, in one single political project. The 'We' is clearly formulated in terms of a belonging to the German community. Birth, and hence confirmation by blood, are the determinants in assigning the constituency of the SVP. Even if some Italians strategically<sup>26</sup> support the German 'People's Party' in terms of their electoral choice, the SVP is, regarding its integrating collective identity and political goals, clearly primordially defined on an ethnic base. Standards of belonging are inflexible and beyond dispute. Outsiders can cooperate with the in-group, but cannot, however, become a full part of the community themselves. Criteria of belonging are easily identifiable: the language and traditional cultural practices provide an apparent reference point in sustaining a system of exclusion along the ethnic dividing line in South Tyrolean society.

Regarding its programmatic orientation the correlated political strategy of the SVP follows consistently. All critical political concerns have been based on the interpretative frame defined by the slogan: *Kampf gegen Rom* ('fight against Rome). Directly after the war, the leadership of the SVP conducted a political course which was characterized by an attentive reserve vis-à-vis the Roman government and by the willingness to cooperate with the DC led administration. The year 1957, however, marked a decisive watershed in the political struggle for autonomy. On the castle *Sigmundskron* 30.000 South Tyroleans gathered to express their dissatisfaction with the political status of their region. The SVP's new, more radical leader Silvius Magnago, on this occasion, formulated this political orientation for the next years: '*Los von Trient*' (Detached from Trient). Primarily fostered by the delaying attitude of the national government towards the realization of the guaranteed autonomy rights, the political advocate of the German-speaking community conducted a far more radical course. The parliamentary and international efforts (South Tyrol became once again a topic at the UN) were accompanied and partially advanced by terrorist attacks by the *Südtiroler Bumser*<sup>27</sup>.

The two decades after the radicalized confrontations, however, are in general

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<sup>26</sup> Here, one has to bear in mind that South Tyrol is the region with one of the lowest unemployment rates, the best public services and education system in Italy.

<sup>27</sup> This is a friendly term for those who committed the terrorist acts in the 1960s. In the officially published history of the region (*Südtirolhandbuch*) these actions are sympathetically described as exclusively directed against objects, never against human beings (next to the electric powerlines the targets were symbols of Italian domination such as the tomb of Tolomei).

characterized by the SVP's ambivalent attitude. Upholding ideologically a position of irreconcilable opposition to the Italian nation-state, the regionalist regime in South Tyrol aimed at a long-term settlement of the latent conflict via negotiations. Since then the relationship with the Italian nation-state and its political system has been predominantly defined along the lines of a strict instrumental approach. Never, as it has been for the Lega, has the Roman based policy processes been the focal point of the SVP's interests or political aspirations. The contacts with the center of political power in Italy have been determined by the interest in obtaining the resources necessary for promoting further autonomy for Südtirol. Despite accusing the Roman political parties and administration of incapacity, the SVP has not had serious aspirations to changing the political destiny of the nation-state of which South Tyrol is part. The only reason for becoming active in the nation-state's Parliament and Senate has been to secure and possibly expand the political and fiscal rights given to regional and local government. The agreement in 1972, *Paketabschluss*, and its recent final confirmation, regulating the form of advanced autonomy adapted in South Tyrol, is the logical result of the political strategy chosen by the SVP. With the 'package' agreement of 1988 the features of a continuous polarization, in fact, did not change in essence but rather confirmed the strategy which had already been adopted in the 1970 and 1980s<sup>28</sup>.

#### **8.4. Changing Features in the Politics Based on a Primordial Collective Identity**

Since the war, politics in South Tyrol has traditionally been based on the segregation and 'civilized' confrontation between the language groups. The belonging to either the German or the Italian community (the Ladins do not play such an important role) has structured political allegiances and orientations. The conflict between the two ethnically assigned social groups has determined any concrete political decision.

Here it is important to be aware of the fact that the ethnic identity in its primordial account could survive to such an astonishing extent in South Tyrol because of the socio-economic environment in which the German population predominantly used to live. Until two decades ago the German citizens of South Tyrol were almost all residents in a backward rural milieu with the distinct features of a culturally isolated and traditionally reproduced lifeworld. The logic of identity production along the ethnic dividing line was not only culturally

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<sup>28</sup> See: Schlitter, Horst, 'Letztes Kapitel einer "unendlichen Geschichte"', in: Frankfurter Rundschau, May 14, 1988, p.5.

sanctioned in a symbolic way but equally confirmed by social and economic endowments. Gubert (1976, 1985 et al., 1988) identified the traditional backward environment as the precondition for the reproduction of an ethnic identity defined by birth-given ascriptive features. For him the degree of urbanization, the increase in spatial mobility, the level of higher education, the increase in activity in the secondary and tertiary sector and the ethnic inter-penetration are important factors in undermining this environment. In South Tyrol it is only very gradually that this structural basis for the primordial identity has been eroding under the impression of the delayed modernization of local rural society.

Given this stable set of traditionally confirmed and reproduced values and ethnic allegiances, in its formative period the SVP could simply exploit the strong sense of belonging and demarcation from 'Others'. On this basis the political rationale on which the SVP's political identity is based develops its own dynamic and structures the strategic decisions regarding its programmatic orientation. Since the SVP has explicitly been built on the claim to defend the minority rights of the German community, its success, and, in the long-run, its political survival, is critically dependent on the clear separation of the ethnically stipulated groups. The less the entire social order the set of socio-economic entitlements and the cultural identity is grounded on the demarcation between the ethnic groups, the less this regionalist catch-all party is able to portray its political aspirations as urgent and indispensable for the German community.

It is against this background that the SVP and the German-dominated provincial administration (Landtag) conducted a policy of total segregation. The leading figure of the Green party in South Tyrol Langer calls this the formation of two 'ethnic blocs' (Langer 1988). This policy found its emblematical expression in a series of regulations leading to the final version of the *Paketabschluss*. Since the early 1970s every field of societal activity - education, culture, sport, housing scheme, economic policy, mass media, religious life and the unions - were structured according to the principle of an autonomous development of each language community, largely disconnected from its respective counterpart. The underlying idea of such a policy is that only the total separation of the lingual groups guarantees their peaceful cooperation.

The consequence is that the German population has become so strong in terms of social and political rights that the Italian citizens themselves feel discriminated against and

claim minority rights<sup>29</sup>. Due to the series of affirmative actions in favor of the German population in key areas of societal life, it indeed seems that we are faced with "one area in Central Europe where there is not a dominated but a dominant minority." (Pallaver 1990:70) The German-speaking South Tyrolese have been able to take over the key positions in the regions as they have been able to secure the lion's share of state posts and grants.

The key measure in this strengthening of the German-speaking Tyrolese has been the so-called "ethnic quotas rule" (*ethnischer Proporz*). According to this regulation, posts in the civil service sector are allocated in proportion to the strength of the ethnic groups (70% Germans) and the principle of bi-linguism is rigorously applied in all sectors of society (Peterlini 1980). In the 1981 census each citizen was asked to declare him- or herself German, Italian or Ladin. Based on this classification, quotas for the single language groups were adopted with the declared aim of adjusting the share of each ethnically defined group in posts and public transfers to its numerical strength. Important social entitlements such as housing and jobs are concerned. One particular regulation in this agreement is the prerequisite that civil servants speak German as well as Italian. Being the main victims of such actions the Italian community in South Tyrol (previously clearly privileged) has understandably reacted with consternation and, politically in terms of its voting behavior, with a radicalization towards the (nationalist) right<sup>30</sup>.

Regarding the overriding collective identity and political orientation that are legitimating and guiding this policy, with this agreement the SVP underlined its character as an 'ethno-nationalist' political force. The underlying rationale of the SVP's political course is indubitably the postulate that only the systematic differentiation of the language groups can guarantee their fruitful development. Magnago's political conviction was clearly guided by the perceived threat of a mixing of the respective cultures. In a highly derogatory sense he continuously spoke about the danger of a '*Verelsäberung*'. As in the formerly German region

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<sup>29</sup> The political reaction to this practice, the massive increase of the votes for the neo-fascist MSI (as the defender and advocate of a strong Italian nation-state) has to be seen in this context (for an in-depth analysis of this voting behavior: Benedikter et al. (1987). Vassalli's book (1985) gives a good impression of how the Italian population perceives the growing predominance of the German community. Vassalli does not hesitate to openly accuse the SVP of a extreme rightist attitude and of the suppression of the social rights of the Italian citizens in South Tyrol.

<sup>30</sup> In Bolzano, for instance, the neo-fascist MSI-DN in 1983 won 22.6% and in 1988 26.8% of the valid votes in the city council (A detailed analysis of these results can be found in Distel, No.1, 1984 (Special issue on the *Landtagswahl*. See on the dynamic towards radicalization: Santner, Inge, 'Häblicher Volkskampf im Herrgottswinkel', in: Die Weltwoche, No.38, 19. September 1985, p.15.

in France the leadership of the SVP portrayed South Tyrol as being caught in a process of a, if not enforced then creeping, Italianization. For the political advocate of the Germans more important than the denial of the concrete political rights is the gradual erosion of the basis of its legitimating collective identity: the intact German cultural community. The SVP dissident, former representative of the 'New Left' and more recently of the 'Greens', Langer, comments this policy as follows:

The "ethnic quotas rule" (*ethnischer Proporz*) and the duty of bilinguality amongst the civil servants have stylized as the essence of the principle of autonomy and the politics for the ethnic group. The corresponding policy of the SVP is presented as the only legitimate one in this respect, and you have to follow it if you do not want to risk to be classified as an opponent to autonomy. (Langer 1988:85)<sup>31</sup>

The programmatic orientation of the SVP is accordingly predominantly oriented towards perpetuating the societal model on which its own political identity is based: in any field of the regional society a policy should be conducted that promotes the separation of the language groups. This strategy of separation is developed for the question of language and cultural affairs but also for personal relationships (For instance, there is only a very limited number of mixed marriages between Italians and Germans; Leidlmair 1987). Thus, the SVP reflects the essential concern of traditional regionalism with cultural and ethnic homogeneity being the prerequisite for its survival (Haller 1991). Any cultural or politically significant social differentiation is perceived as a genuine threat to the very existence of this type of territorial actor.

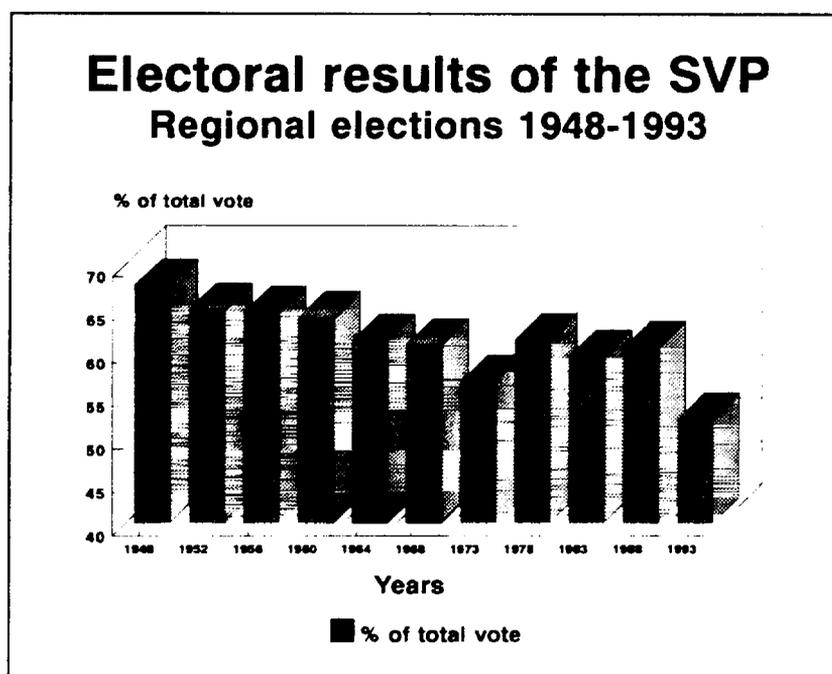
### 8.5. Redefined Lines of Conflict: The Decline of the Regionalist Catch-all Party

Recent political developments in South Tyrol indicate a more far-reaching transformation process in the political landscape of the region than just a transitory crisis in the leadership of the *Südtiroler Volkspartei*. With the final ratification of the 'package' the SVP has entered a phase in which its hegemony, formed by the unconditional loyalty of the German population, is under pressure. In fact, in the provincial elections in autumn 1993, for the first time in postwar history, the SVP came close to losing its absolute majority in the provincial parliament (*Landtag*). As indicated in the table below, the 'People's Party' lost over 8% of its consent on the provincial level, where after the war it was regularly supported

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<sup>31</sup> Widmann gives an analysis of the "*Sprachgruppenzugehörigkeitserklärung*" (declaration about belonging to a language group) which is similar in direction (Widmann, Carlos, 'Das Gift an der Klause von Salurn', in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10./11. October 1981).

by over 60% of the electorate. In some municipalities the party of the German minority lost up to 25% of its traditional support<sup>32</sup>. New parties which until recently did not play a role in regional politics have begun to attract votes<sup>33</sup>. There are clear indications that the landscape of the regional party is moving towards a more pluralistic picture which had previously been frustrated by the SVP's claim as a *Sammelpartei* (unifying party) for all Germans.



Until recently it seemed that the declining trend of the SVP was first of all a matter of regional elections in which its performance in local politics was judged. On a national level the antagonism to the Italian nation-state was manifestly still strong enough to unite the German-speaking population. In the most recent European elections in June 1994, however, the SVP lost almost 4% of the votes that it had won in April's general elections. With 56.8%

<sup>32</sup> See for more detailed results: Südtirol Profil, No.22b, November 24, 1993.

<sup>33</sup> Another figure shows that the political allegiance between the German-speaking community and the SVP is no longer an uncontested fact. Before the provincial elections in Winter 1993, surveys pointed to a rate of 35-40% of undecided voters. The SVP's regular voters are in sharp decline and the number of floating voters reach an uncommonly high degree for South Tyrolean standards (In October 1993 only 23,2% of the interviewees said they would vote for the SVP; Südtirol Profil, No.18, October 18, 1993). An 'ethnically determined' voting behavior seems to be no longer a matter of course. See: Rohrer, Josef, 'Partei der Frustierten', in: Südtirol Profil, No.20, November 8, 1993, p.28-29.

in South Tyrol the *Volkspartei* had one of the worst electoral results since the War<sup>34</sup>.

The most remarkable developments amongst the German electorate are in this respect the following: rightist organizations have taken over the 'nationalist' propaganda which, in its mild form, used to shape the political line of the SVP. The *Heimabund* and the *Südtiroler Freiheitliche Partei*, the latter being a scion of Haider's Austrian counterpart (FPÖ), are challenging the dominant representative of the German-speaking community. They effectively compare the SVP's negotiated 'autonomy' with the more extensive notion of 'self-

**Table:** Electoral results of most important parties in provincial elections (*Landtag*) in South Tyrol (1988/93)

Party\ Electoral result	1988*	1993
SVP	60.4%	52.0%
MSI-Alleanza Naz.	10.3%	11.7%
DC (PPI)	9.1%	4.4%
Greens	6.7%	6.9%
PSI	4.0%	1.3%
PCI (PDS) + Rif. Com.	3.0%	3.6%
Heimatb./ Union Südtir.	2.3%	4.8%
Lega Nord	-	3.0%
Freiheitliche Partei Südt.	-	6.1%
Union di Centro	-	1.7%
Ladins	-	2.0%

determination'<sup>35</sup>. The traditional representative of the Germans is accused of having made too many concessions to the Roman government and thus robbing South Tyrol of its 'true' destiny of fully realized political self-determination. The *Heimabund* (the organization of E. Klotz), often smiled at as a utopian and folklorist organization, has gained new credibility since some former SVP politicians, amongst whom the well known Alfons Benedikter, have joined<sup>36</sup>. More surprising was the electoral result of the right-wing, openly racist *Freiheitlichen* (it gained 6.1% in its first electoral performance). Both the *Heimabund* and the 'Liberals' of Austrian origin used radical nationalist (or better: regionalist) slogans with which they hoped to attract those who are in favor of a drastic dissolution of South Tyrol from the Italian nation-state.

Another form of ethno-centrism can be found in the rise of an independent Ladin

<sup>34</sup> See: K. Peterlini, 'Sieg der Verlierer', in: *Südtirol Profil*, No.24, June 14, 1994.

<sup>35</sup> See in this respect the South Tyrolian head of the *Freiheitlichen* C. Waldner and his critique of the *Verzichtspolitik* ('renouncement politics') of the SVP (Waldner 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Doubling its electoral results in last provincial elections the *Union für Südtirol* under the lead of the *Heimabund* explicitly claims to inherit the SVP as a 'movement of the German people'; see: A. Maier, 'Wir sind die Volksbewegung', in: *FF*, No.48, Nov., 1993, p.30ff.

party, the political representative of the smallest language minority in South Tyrol. The Ladins had been close allies of the SVP, leaving it to the far more potent German counterpart to force Rome to grant minority rights to the different language groups<sup>37</sup>. The provincial elections in 1993 hence mark a decisive watershed in this small language minority's political orientation. Its refusal to be represented any longer by the SVP, as stipulated in the platform of the 'People's Party', means a significant setback for the *Sammelpartei*'s claim to be the unifying political advocate for everybody belonging to the non-Italian community.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the Greens as well as various communal alliances were able to stabilize their consent (in the European elections 1994 their electoral share rose to 8.9% of the valid votes). From a different angle, Langer's Green party in particular criticizes the SVP's political stand since the 'package'. For those advocating a substantive integration of the language groups into an undivided South Tyrolean society, the SVP's insistence on the ethnic split as the all-dominating frame of political orientation for the German-speaking population is no longer appropriate. As part of the 'New Left', the Greens stand for the opposition against politics of segregation. For them, the SVP's entire approach, determined by the hypothesis that only a clear and just separation of the ethnic groups can guarantee their benevolent coexistence, is not viable for the region's future. Given the nature of modern society, according to the Greens, such an ethnically defined cultural homogeneity as the base for political mobilization is no longer viable at the end of twentieth century.

### **8.5.1. Features of Crisis in Reproducing Ethnic Identity and the Decline of the Political Loyalties to the SVP**

The electoral results indicate that in regional politics the link between being German and voting for the SVP is no longer sacrosanct; new political options such as the Greens, the rightist Heimatbund and the *Freiheitlichen* (united in the alliance *Federalismo*) as well as, especially in the early 1980s, leftist organizations and the Lega, have become a feasible political alternative. The loss of the electoral consensus in last regional elections in late 1993 reflects not only the current crisis in leadership but also a long-term decline in support for the SVP. The following thesis can be formulated: the more successful this 'German' party is in

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<sup>37</sup> The political success of the Ladin organization (2%) is an expression of a growing self-consciousness of this small language minority. Interestingly, a fortified ethnic identity has become the means for the struggle for more autonomy rights (See: Schwazer, Heinrich, 'Halbe Pusterer', in: *Südtirol Profil*, No.22, November 24, 1993, p.18-19.

increasing the region's autonomy, the less its own political identity is defined by an overwhelmingly strong enemy from outside (the Italian nation-state), and the less attractive is a political program essentially based on ethnic features. Its *raison d'être* to defend the rights of the German community is about to lose its distinct prominence. In this context it is important to realize that the SVP is not able to simply adopt new political issues, relegating the defense of the ethnic minority rights to a subordinated position in its political discourse. The SVP's collective identity as an ethnically based political movement sets very constricted limits on a substantial change in its programmatic stand. The split between the Italian and the German community and the resulting opposition to the Italian nation-state turns out to be of only limited use as an interpretative frame in tackling new political issues (such as environment, political corruption, etc.).

However, there is also a historical reason for the undermining of the traditional polarization, one that reaches back to the First World War. Not only does the gradual reconciliation with the Roman administration politically threaten the undefeated predominance of the SVP in regional politics, but more significantly the younger generations no longer see ethnic identity as the only and decisive determinant of their political and social identity. Many of the younger people have grown up bilingually, they have watched Italian television and some of them have decided to study in Italy (instead of going to Innsbruck). Although they are still not totally integrated, the new generations do not perceive Italian culture and politics as an intrinsic threat. The opposition to anything from the south which coloured the perception of the post-war generation, has become a matter of the past. In research on territorial politics this impact of the modernization process and its transformation of individual and collective experience and learning processes on ethnic mobilization is often disregarded. As Nielsen accurately observes:

Less well researched, but not less significant, is the process by which assimilation occurs within the peripheral culture, as the network of interactions widens and individuals of the periphery experience more contacts outside their local setting. (Nielsen 1985:141)

With respect to the case of South Tyrol one can speak of a 'dual identity' that is only partly compatible with the primordial approach that has traditionally constituted the tool kit for South Tyrolian society. Indubitably, this unquestioned, birth-given roots still play an important role for the younger generation. Apart from their integration into this regional existence, however, these young people from South Tyrol are, to a varying degree, also shaped by Italian and European influences or simply by the daily co-existence of the two main lingual groups. The particular problem of the traditional form of territorially defined

collective identity is, according to the conceptual framework developed in the theoretical section, the fact that the primordial identity has lost much of its credibility primarily because its basic cognitive codes can no longer be traditionally reproduced and hence no longer provide the resources to sustain its credibility. What is at stake here is that the latter form of identity, the concrete lifeworld experiences, no longer firmly supports the reproduction of the primordially sanctioned pattern of communal integration. Continuity is evidently needed but it only endures as a stable feature of orientation, if the collective identity's modes of reproduction are constantly reformulated and adapted to the changing social environment. Therborn describes this need for a dynamic development and its difficulties for a form of collective identity, which is manifestly present in the case of South Tyrol, as follows:

Culturally determined actions have a strong tendency to reproduce the culture they have sprung from, its sense of identity, its world of meaning, its values and norms..... One is the socialization of new members, which is never easy and which may become problematic if the culture has been strongly effected by unique or particular historical experiences of the parent generation. (Therborn 1991:186)

Regarding the problematic 'dual identity' prevailing in the South Tyrolean case, Langer speaks about the 'basement' and the 'first floor' where social interaction between the groups is shaped. The former denotes the sphere of communal life in which spontaneous forms of cooperation have been generated that go beyond the ethnically defined dividing lines in South Tyrolian society. The latter realm of societal life, however, the administration's policy and regulations concerning the relationships and entitlements of each group, could be seen as undermining the potential for these spontaneous forms of coexistence. The confrontation, to enlarge upon this thesis, is deprived of its original impulse, i.e., the vigorous conflict between two social groups with ethnically framed collective identities and distinct political goals. Large parts of the rationale of this conflict have disappeared; the irreconcilable antagonism has been replaced by conflictual collaboration. The driving force in this friction has now become the institutional arrangements originally designed to settle the conflict. While the ideational legitimating basis, the collective identity that is belligerently demarcated from the opposing one, is eroding, the governmental regulations tend to spur its historically obsolete reproduction<sup>38</sup>. In its basic features the collective identity is based on the reduction to some concrete features of communal life which plausibility are undermined by the dynamic

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<sup>38</sup> The SVP perceives such a political position as an assault on its very political identity and the entire political approach it stands for. Accordingly, Magnago formulates his disagreement in the following terms: "Langer has no feeling for a *volkliche Identität* (people's identity) whatsoever", in: Südtirol Profil, No.20, November 8, 1993, p.22-26.

of highly differentiated modern society. Regarding the cultural policy Gatterer describes polemically the split between the official discourse and the concrete lifeworld experiences as follows:

On the field of school and cultural policy young people in South Tyrol feel the distance between school and social reality, between culture and life. South Tyrol entirely participates in EC-reality in terms of material well being and social practices (abortion, divorce). The text book, however, lectures loyalty to the soil, the divinity of straw mattress, the nobility of the old wooden plough and the blessing of many children. (Gatterer 1991:390)

A critical aspect in this context is hence the dynamic created by the institutional setting in which regionalist interests are formed and articulated<sup>39</sup>. The strategy conducted by the SVP massively points towards an opening towards Europe ('South Tyrol in a Europe of the regions' has become the *Leitmotiv* of the SVP's political approach). However, political opportunities - on a national as well as on a European level - might be counterproductive in the long term since they are likely to pose crucial problems to the traditional collective identity. Institutionally, the isolation of South Tyrol which has prevailed so far will come to an end and new experiences and ideas will be brought to this region through the resulting personal mobility and exchange. Boundaries will become less clear-cut and subject to a more reflexive consensus. For a primordial collective identity this means the problem of convincingly defending the notion of the claimed unquestioned political primacy and superiority of the community on ethnic grounds<sup>40</sup>.

Furthermore, the political agenda that is based upon this type of collective identity, because of the strong push towards European integration, faces the possibility of losing its firm foundation. The opposed dominance of nation-state agencies becomes less and less pressing under the impression of the diminishing meaning of national boundaries. The territorial reference is decreasingly manifest. The boundaries of the community, the strict demarcation from the threatening 'Non-We', are losing their politically rationale in a world shaped by a new model of supra-national integration. The polarization with the nation-state,

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<sup>39</sup> See in more general terms on the role of institutions in the formation of regional politics: Poche (1991).

<sup>40</sup> To a certain extent the SVP's politicians are aware of this targeted difficult shift in the collective identity towards a European orientation. Being asked whether the SVP as a *Sammelpartei* has become senseless since the 'package agreement' Siegfried Brugger, *Obmann* (head) of the SVP, says: "Surely, after the package agreement there has been a turning-point for us. The package was agreed upon but the peasants of a European region Tyrol mentally have not been able to accept this. We are in a transitory period." (Interview in *Südtirol Profil*, No.22, November 24, 1993) Evidently, the problem is perceived mainly as a kind of 'time lag' in an assimilation process. A more substantial incompatibility between the forms of collective identity is not seen.

classical agenda of regionalist actors, thus no longer has an immediate mobilizing effect. Pragmatic concerns about how to gain economical and political influence on the European scene are tending to replace the irreconcilable opposition to the nation-state center. Thus, for the SVP, whose political approach is essentially based on ethnic features, the strong political reference to European unification, besides its gains in a functionalist perspective, threatens the critical integrative force of its collective identity. The pragmatism of a primarily managerial approach to a common market and the highly emotional reference to the endangered *Heimat* are not very compatible.

Interestingly, this connection is very seldom reflected in the considerations of the people concerned with this problem. It is worth looking at in detail what the head of the organization *Europaunion Südtirol* said in an interview conducted in 1993. Asked about the possible deterioration of the indigenous culture he declared:

This is a question of major concern for us. In fact, I see a gradual and creeping process of acculturation that we are witnessing in all sections of our society. Amongst us Germans - we say Germans, although we are actually Tyrolian people - the consciousness is slowly fading away that we are particular, that we are different. Even if I compare my generation with that of my parents there is a huge difference in the perception of what it means to be German. Seeing the young people today I sometimes get the impression that belonging to our language community does not mean all that much for them.

Commenting on the gravity of this question he continues in another context:

We have to teach our children the importance of being part of the South Tyrolian community. A society that forgets its roots is indeed threatened by a serious loss of orientation. As many examples show, the likely result of such a development is a deteriorating sense of alienation, a loss of identity.

Mayor emphasis is manifestly put on the cultural disintegration of the ethnically conceived German community. It is noteworthy that, although being mainly asked about the European aspect for the Alp region, the interviewee did not even make the effort to link the concern for cultural change with the wider political-institutional setting. The ethnically framed collective identity is perceived as something a-priori to and exempt from the sphere of policy making.

Besides the gradual deterioration of the socio-cultural environment in which the SVP flourished, on strict political grounds this declining integrative power of the traditionally dominant collective identity finds the following expressions. The first reason for a growing opposition to the SVP is apparent. Having already been accused in the past of 'betraying' the German population, now with the final agreement about its status as a region within Italy the leadership in South Tyrol has come under attack from the more radical wing of the regionalist

movement. Especially for those associated with the *Heimatbund* it is illegitimate to conclude any prospect to reach an ultimate unification with North Tyrol. In electoral terms this groups of maximalists is, however, still rather restricted in its political significance.

The most important argument behind the different new political groups, challenging the monopoly of representation occupied by the SVP, is centered around a questioning of the underlying legitimacy of the 'People's Party'. From various viewpoints they blame the political voice of the German community of not adequately meeting its claim to represent all social groups. The SVP is accused of becoming a political party guided by the particularistic interests of certain classes or pressure groups. Blaschke described this as an endemic threat to well-established regionalist actors. According to him these regimes often tend to fall victim to a development in the course of which they seek, on the basis of some kind of tactic unanimity with the attacked nation-state, to carry through the interest of the powerful social groups in the region (Blaschke 1985, 1988)<sup>41</sup>.

For the SVP this finds its exemplary expression in the party's internal conflict between the employees' association and the employer dominated mainstream of the 'People's Party'. Being more and more restricted in their political say and often, for the first time, unconfirmed in their party's posts<sup>42</sup>, the unionist fraction of the SVP has come to question the legitimating political base of the SVP. The notable push to the right within the party threatens to contradict the SVP's claim that it represents the interests of all strata. Against the background of an intensified marginalization within the party the head of the employees, S. Kußtatscher, formulates his point along hitherto unknown conflictual lines. Directly addressing the chairman of the SVP he said after an open conflict with the SVP:

You should know that it is your attitude that makes us to consider leaving the SVP. .. Dear *Obmann*, the question is whether Südtirol still needs a "*Sammelpartei*" (with internal plurality!) or if it would be more appropriate for South Tyrol's future, in terms of democratic considerations, to have a "normal" plurality of parties and interest groups. Often I have justified the model of the *Sammelpartei*:, also abroad. Considering however our internal discussions I think we have reached a point at which this model faces severe difficulties<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Blaschke categorizes this attempt of the old regional elites to sustain their privileges under changed social and political circumstances as the expression of the 'old regionalism'. He speaks of established notabilities behind which material interest the call for cultural and political self-determination becomes an empty phrase (Blaschke 1988).

<sup>42</sup> For instance, Kußtatscher as well as other representatives of the SVP's left, employer-oriented wing did not succeed in gaining a direct mandate in the provincial parliament in 1993 provincial elections.

<sup>43</sup> This statement is cited in: 'Fürsorgliche Erpressung', *FE*, No.20, 1993.

The territorially conceived collective identity is no longer able to serve as a convincing basis for unifying the particularistic claims and generating the image of a spontaneous 'ethnic' unanimity indispensable for political mobilization. The egalitarian promise of an ethnically framed collective identity is questioned by the experience of other forms of social stratification within the German community. With the manifest de-radicalization in political conflict the integrating collective identity has gradually become a strategic resource for individuals' and groups' political bargaining. In the course of this transformation the regionalist conflict undergoes a 'civilizing development'. The belonging to an ethnically assigned group no longer has the existential meaning originally attributed to it. Rather, it becomes a matter of a calculating choice determined by a perceived gradual win or loss in the pursuit of one's personal or collective material interests. Communal belonging is increasingly a strategic decision rather than an unavoidable destination. This manifestly means a critical shift regarding the mobilizing potential of the primordially defined collective identity. Political loyalty is no longer spontaneously generated by birth. Habitual modes of legitimation, on the grounds of which primordially integrated regionalist movements have traditionally generated their consensus, no longer hold. Particularist or thematically different interests emancipate from the formerly overriding ethnically framed features of social and political integration.

Pointing to these first signs of a crumbling of the integrative model on which territorial politics was traditionally based in South Tyrol, one has to be aware of the slow evolutionary development we are witnessing in this respect. We are not on the verge of revolutionary changes in the region's political landscape<sup>44</sup>. Nevertheless, as the electoral results indicate, particularly in local and provincial elections political loyalty to the German 'People's Party' is no longer an unchangeable factor.

On this basis, the following more general thesis can be formulated: with a transformation of a collective identity from a "traditional form" (Weber) of legitimacy towards one that is based on the calculating interests of the assigned member, its role in political mobilization changes essentially. A stable, to a certain degree, 'unconditional' political loyalty that is generated on a non-reflexive habitually basis, is hereby replaced by an allegiance that is generated by case to case decisions by the members. This has major ramifications on the

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<sup>44</sup> This Alp region is, as a result of its above-discussed past, in fact an outstanding example of stability in the alignment to the regionalist party. As Hosp, formerly chairman of the SVP, in the middle of the 1980s remarks: "It is a matter of fact that the South Tyroleans until now have been able to maintain outstanding political unanimity and unity." (Hosp 1986: 234)

model of political mobilization propagated on primordial patterns. It threatens to disintegrate the very political rationale of this type of territorial movement. Political allegiances, formulated on the grounds of clearly defined and measurable interests, unavoidably provoke the rise of more pluralistic forms of political representations. The claim of a 'People's Party' to unanimously stand for the ethnic group becomes vulnerable on different terrains. With the declining integrative power of the non-reflexive pertinence of the primordial identity, particular interests, normative as well as material ones, more easily become stronger than the proclaimed unity of the people (as the intrinsic legitimating design of regionalist actors). In contrast, for cultural or civic forms of collective identity, the resulting refusal of the monopoly of political representation by one ethnically defined party and its interpretative frame is not necessarily perceived as a critical menace. Rather, pluralism is an inherent part of their integrative model.

#### **8.5.1.1. An Excursion: the Future of a Territorial Identity in South Tyrol**

What is at stake regarding the discussion of the impact of broader socio-structural change on the reproduction of the collective identity traditionally dominant in South Tyrol is its repercussions on macro-political change. Hypothesizing that the reproductive logic of the primordial identity is in a stage of disintegration does not necessarily mean that we are heading towards the end of territorial politics as a relevant feature in South Tyrol. As already explained in the theoretical part of this thesis, a territorially defined collective identity is not contradicted *per se* by the imperatives of modern society. Mass culture, globalization, enhanced mobility and the rationalization of the societal sphere may, on the contrary, generate the need for small and traditionally integrated social units.

In the South Tyrolean case the cultural tradition and established organization of the lifeworld will very likely contribute to the survival of a strong attachment to the local community. The longing for such less anonymous forms of life is an integral element of a post-materialist value orientation that is widespread in the Alps region. In accordance with the rise of 'post-materialist values' notions of communal and localist belonging may persist as a shaping impact on the organization of the lifeworld of some social groups.

These features of communal integration with a distinct reference to a small territorial unit will, however, be characterized by in essence different elements than those established by the primordial collective identity. Even if ethnically formulated this 'modern' notion of

communal belonging will necessarily be reflexive in character. It will no longer be perceived as a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (community constituted by common fate) but as an intentional choice for the organization of one's life. Identity and the relation to the other members of the community are here less the result of spontaneous ways of socializing than a deliberate option.

The political consequences are apparent. The mechanisms for creating political allegiances basically follow the logic of a deliberate personal decision. Communal belonging along these new patterns is no longer determined by a natural and stable engagement for an ethnically assigned collective actor. On the ground of the individual's value orientation changing political preferences become feasible. There is no longer the all-dominating tie to a social group. Likewise, political allegiances will no longer be determined by the features of communal belonging. Single political issues will gain in importance vis-à-vis the overriding claim of a fate-given ethnic belonging.

### **8.5.2. The Challenged Hegemony of the 'People's Party'**

It is the guiding thesis in analyzing the case of South Tyrol that the cognitive codes on which the 'People's Party's' collective identity has traditionally been based - as a primordial prototype - faces a crucial challenge. The logic of its habitual form of political mobilization undergoes a deep-rooted crisis. What we find in the case of the SVP is a non-accidental coincidence of a steady crisis in the reproduction of its integrating primordial collective identity and a crisis in party leadership.

The presentday difficulties are essentially rooted in the political orientation of the 'People's Party', in the past defined by the reasoning of an ethnic minority party. Particularly in the decade after the Second World War but also, after a period of transitory radicalization, the SVP conducted an ambivalent course vis-à-vis the Roman government. On the one hand, it was critical for its integrating collective identity to emphasize the radical opposition against the Italian capital and the attempts of its political representatives to discriminate against the Germans in South Tyrol. On the other hand, in the concrete policy process and in parliamentary life a line of conciliatory cooperation was sought. In fact, the situation since the formation of the administration under Berlusconi is the first one in which the SVP has

nationally been in the opposition since the World War Two<sup>45</sup>. In recent decades the SVP firmly supported the DC-dominated coalitions in its primary aim to oppose a possible 'communist take-over'. The SVP's political nature was hence characterized by a peculiar mixture of pragmatism regarding its attitude towards national government and of polarization regarding the split between ethnically framed language communities in the region itself (the latter implying an insistence on the center-periphery conflict).

With the final agreement about the autonomy status of South Tyrol, the defining pattern of the SVP's traditional collective identity, the unconditional defense of their own language group and the quest for self-determination tend to lose their mobilizing power. In 1969, after the first formulation of the 'package' (only 52% of the SVP's members present at the general meeting voted in favor of the agreement), at least rhetorically the 'People's Party' still claimed that the achieved autonomy status was transitory in character. The option of a more extensive form of self-determination, possibly outside the Italian nation-state, was not totally abandoned at this stage. In 1992, however, with the ratification of the agreement by the South Tyrolean *Landtag* (June 1992) the legislative basis for the future of the region basically became a final solution. In this context it is of quite considerable symbolic significance that the SVP has recently not only refused to participate in but actively sought to prevent a meeting of supporters of a united Tyrol across the Italian-Austrian border<sup>46</sup>.

Such an orientation has necessarily led to opposition from the nationalist hard-liners. In the so far rather marginal *Heimatbund* and the right-nationalist *Freiheitlichen* they have found a new political home. Of particular political significance in this respect is the fact that some well-known figures left the SVP in ostentatious protest<sup>47</sup>. The most notable besides the above-mentioned formerly leading personalities, was the official in charge for the cultural policy of the *Schützenbund*, Luis Zingerle. After ten years of engagement for the SVP as a

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<sup>45</sup> The reason for this step is, however, not so much a substantial political dissent with Berlusconi. Rather, the SVP's decision is motivated by the participation of ministers of the neo-fascist MSI/AN, against the background of the trauma caused by Mussolini's regime.

<sup>46</sup> On September 15 1991, organized by the *Heimatbund*, the *Schützen* and the *Freiheitlichen* over 8000 'patriots' gathered near the Brenner in order to underline their dissatisfaction with the autonomy status attained by the *Paket*. (See: 'L'autodeterminazione? Scelta sbagliata. La SVP censura il deputato ribelle', in: *L'Unità*, September 2, 1991; and: '"Macché Lituania?" alla fine i sudtirolesi rimangono dove sono', in: *La Repubblica*, September 17, 1991.

<sup>47</sup> The key words in the political discourse of the *Heimatbund* are "betrayal" and *Verzichtspolitik* ('renouncement politics'); see: Union für Südtirol, *Tatbestand des Verrates durch Magnago, Brugger und Durnwalder*, Bozen 1993.

deputy of the regional parliament and as a provincial *Obmann* he left the 'People's Party', accusing it vigorously of a "betrayal of its principles"<sup>48</sup>. Traditionally there was an indefatigable unanimity between the SVP and this influential representative of the German *Volkstum* (people's cultural heritage); now this is a matter of the past. The *Schützenbund* even considered officially calling for election of the *Freiheitlichen*.

Besides the most important issue of South Tyrol's relationship to the Italian nation-state, several internal fights and scandals in recent years have contributed to the shaking hegemony of the SVP. Even if there has so far been no involvement of German-speaking politicians in the machinations of *tangentopoli*, almost fifty years of consecutive responsibility in the province have meant some abuse of power. A noticeable estrangement between the German population and its 'natural' political advocate has been the foreseeable consequence. The immediate correspondence of the language community and its political representatives, essential element of regionalist forces in denouncing the unresponsive nation-state politics, has lost much of its credibility. This finds its expression in the aggressive emergence of particularistic claims that were formerly less able to make themselves heard. The conflict of interest between the unionist, worker's wing and the clientele of the employers, the diverging concerns of environmental groups and business fractions, all represented by the 'unifying party', is not a new feature in the SVP. Today, however, these lines of conflict have gained a new quality. They are no longer firmly subordinated to the overriding ethnic conflict. The collective identity of the SVP itself, the primordial patterns of belonging, are questioned in their political meaning under the impression of manifestly more pressing incentives in formulating political preferences.

The tendency towards a more pluralistic political landscape is also confirmed by the development in the mass media. The importance of the SVP's organ *Volkshote* is, as indicated by the decrease in copies, in decline. In contrast, a new weekly has been published since 1993, the *Südtirol Profil*. It was founded with the declared aim of confronting the established "uncritical attitude" of the press vis-à-vis the political regime in South Tyrol. Dissidents from the until then exclusive weekly (*FF Südtiroler Illustrierte*) set up their own project when critique against the SVP-led administration began to be perceived no longer as an 'ethnic betrayal'. As recent political developments indicate, their undertaking is widely perceived as

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<sup>48</sup> See: G. Pallaver, 'Überhaupt nicht tirolerisch', in: *FF*, No.39, 1993. And also on the contested participation of the *Schützen* at the Sigmundskron: 'Judas, Raffl und der Südtiroler Landtag', in: *FF*, No.37, 1993. See also: 'Leitner "freiheitlicher" Kandidat', in: *Dolomiten*, March 29, 1993. On the characteristics of the more profound conflict see: 'Schützen ricco attacca "Noi tirolesi, cioè europei"', in: *La Repubblica*, September 6, 1991.

legitimate by the South Tyrolean public because it is primarily seen as politically directed against the power cartel established by the SVP and not against the political rights of the German community as such (a polemic interpretative frame easily applied in the past).

As a consequence of and simultaneously as a catalytic force in these disintegrating dynamics the image of the SVP has substantially changed. The ideological claim of an immediate and indispensable correspondence between the German people and its political representative has lost its credibility amongst large parts of the SVP's traditional constituency<sup>49</sup>.

### 8.5.3. The Ambiguous Modernization of the Party

The long-term deterioration of the legitimating collective identity of the SVP is shown by three crucial events determinant for the political environment in which the party seeks to stabilize its political mobilization: the above-mentioned package agreement, the replacement of the charismatic Magnago by colorless successors as the *Obmann* (chairman) of the SVP in the last years and *tangentopoli* that has also effected the political climate of an established party such as the SVP. To stabilize political loyalty, the SVP has had to adapt its political identity to these new challenges. One step in the necessary transformation was simply the unavoidable generational shift in its leading figures and, given their political socialization, their new perspective on the future of the *Sammelpartei*. Pallaver states in this context:

A new generation of forty-year-olds, unburdened by the past, has assumed the political leadership in the province, ..... Their new pragmatic style of leadership, which no longer regards ethnic principles as the sole dogma of policy and which seeks social consensus among the different language groups, points the way to a new phase of reduced tension. (Pallaver 1990: 78)

The actual development of the SVP, however, indicates that the revised orientation towards its predominant issue and the corresponding modernization is far more ambivalent. Programmatically, the 'People's Party' has indeed adopted new themes amongst which the environment is by far the most important one, thus reacting to the rise of the Greens and the growing concern for environmental issues in South Tyrol.

On the other hand, however, the political agenda is structured and set in its basic

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<sup>49</sup> In an anecdote an interviewee illustrated this changed climate, in which the SVP seeks to sustain its political mobilization, as follows: "In the past, a German talking negatively about the SVP would have been immediately abandoned by his neighbors on the benches of a pub. Today, this rather happens to those who speak in favor of our politicians from the *Volkspartei*."

elements by the still dominant nature of the primordial collective identity. One indication here is without doubt the demarcation of the outer boundaries of the community and the criteria by which members are assigned. In the current party programme this critical point is framed in the following way: "South Tyrol is the home of all people that respect the fundamental values of the community in democracy and mutual respect and that accept the autonomy status as a common property". And it is only in this more recent sense of accepting the autonomy regulations, i.e., the strict application of ethnic quotas rules, that "the SVP acknowledges the Italian language group's claim to consider South Tyrol as their home." Furthermore it says in the revised and modernized programme: "The roots of the *Heimatrecht* ('right for home') lie in the faithfulness to the values of history, culture, tradition and liberty".<sup>50</sup> What is insinuated here is still the primacy of the German 'history, culture and tradition', which, because of their essentially primordial conception, are virtually unattainable for the Italian-speaking citizens. It is not an equal integration on the basis of civic properties that serves as the *entrebillet* into the community, but the condition to have properties at one's disposal that, in the above formulation at least implicitly, presuppose a primordial mode of societal integration.

This crucial issue is deliberately framed in a very vague manner. These 'modern' formulations are phrased in such way that it still allows ethnically conceived primordial criteria to be adopted for the purposes of exclusion. As will become clearer in the following discussion: given the character of its integrating collective identity the SVP basically could not make civil values the only basis for communal belonging. This would have simply undermined the boundaries of the ethnically defined community that the SVP claims to represent and whose preservation is stipulated as a guiding political principle. One indication of this is the fact that the possible loss of the ethnic group's identity is a crucial problem in the political discourse of the party's representatives. Most political issues are directly linked to their potential repercussions on the reproduction of the indigenous collective identity. The preservation of these features is taken as a kind of meta-political imperative to which all concrete decisions are subordinated. The perpetuation of the ethnically framed identity, and here first of all of the language, is the *conditio sine qua non* of the specific form of territorial politics conducted by the SVP<sup>51</sup>. A well known figure in the regionalist spectrum, Franz

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<sup>50</sup> See on the internal debates on the formulation of the new SVP's programme: 'Ewig im Edelweiß', in: *FE*, No.19, 1993; 'Edel sei die Partei, hilfreich und gut', in: *FE*, No.4, 1993.

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, the general secretary of the SVP: Hosp 1986.

Pahl, within the SVP an advocate of a more radical solution to the South Tyrol problem (i.e., a potential unification with Austria), is clear about this prerequisite in the struggle for minority rights. For him, "South Tyrol is a cultural question that is carried out in political terms." (Pahl 1991:58). Accordingly he points to the main danger threatening the struggle for self-determination:

The real danger is in a long-term perspective the 'softening' of the *Volksgruppe* (national group/ O.S.) for which we have already the first, may be so far not too serious indications. (Ibd.: 26)... The peril of a mixing and assimilation of the German is always present. (ibid.:110)

Regarding the nature of a primordially integrated collective identity and its prospect of flexibility in terms of an adjustment to the changing socio-political environment the following argument shall be advanced: the range of a required transformation in its political program and strategy of this type of territorial politics is highly limited. In order to successfully sustain its political mobilization the ethnically assigned lines of conflict need to be kept stable. Any questioning of the integrating primordial features along cultural or civic lines would necessarily tend to undermine the very legitimating basis of such a political force. The condition for the reproduction of the logic on which its political mobilization is based, the continuity in the fundamental ethnic dividing line, is hence the commanding imperative in its political campaigns.

The SVP is a striking illustration of this essential connection between the integrating collective identity and the feasible range of political options. As the campaigns and declarations in the context of the latest elections in fact indicate, the integrating collective identity, upon which the SVP's political approach is based, is unchanged in its substance. Despite the geo-political changes and the long-term settlement of the regionalist conflict, the SVP maintains its established logic of political mobilization. The poster which was used in the last electoral campaigns confirms this point: the picture shows a group of people of different ages and social backgrounds. What they have in common is the South Tyrolian costume that they all wear. Underneath the picture the politically seemingly non-partisan phrase is written: *Wir Südtiroler* ('We South Tyrolese'). The message is clear: What the poster apparently seeks to suggest is that sharing the collective identity as a German, the belonging to this ethnically assigned community and the soil it lives on, necessarily leads to a preference for the SVP. With an all-dominating collective identity, programmatic concerns are basically of secondary importance in determining one's political choice.

Similarly Silvius Magnago, chairman of the SVP for almost thirty years and the political godfather of the party, justifies the basically unchanged political course of the

'People's Party'. On being asked whether it is not a normal development that, under the given political developments in South Tyrol, the SVP should start to lose consensus and that a new and more pluralistic party scene should emerge, he replied:

No, this is not a normal development at all. I do not have to tell you that we need a big and potent party also in the future, given the state we are living in. We are obliged to be continuously on the alert to prevent any attempt to undermine our autonomy..... I am convinced that the South Tyrolean electorate is aware that we live in a foreign state and that we hence need a *Sammelpartei* (unifying party)<sup>52</sup>

On a more general level Magnago framed the underlying existential danger of assimilation as follows: "It is useless to continue speaking German if we acquire Italian ways and mentalities... An ethnic minority must never lose its fear of disappearing. Once it does, it will disappear."<sup>53</sup>

The justification of the hegemony of the political representative of the German community is stationary. The outside boundary of the community and the image of an 'enemy' as a perpetual threat to the validity of its minority rights still forms the legitimating ground of its political mobilization. According to the SVP's political discourse the ethnic split persists in constituting the all-dominating frame of reference for the political orientation of the German population in South Tyrol. The continuity of the political struggle with the unloved Italian nation-state prevails over the salience of new political issues. Although the package agreement is celebrated as the final break-through for the relationship of the language minority with the Roman government, the traditional antagonism, valid for the political identity of the SVP for decades, is described as still fashioning the most important lines of political conflict in South Tyrol.

This continuity in the political orientation of the SVP, the inflexibility in productively reacting to the manifest challenges to its collective identity can be exemplarily illustrated by addressing the language issue (the question of the so-called *Toponomastik*, the science of toponomastic names): with the ratification of the package agreement one highly debated issue has been about how to proceed with the names of the towns and villages, which under Tolomei were Italianized and which since the war have been used bilingually<sup>54</sup>. In the last

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with S. Magnago, 'Die SVP zerreit nicht so schnell', in: *Sdtirol Profil*, No.20, November 8, 1993, p.22-26.

<sup>53</sup> Cited in 'Nationalism's foothold in the Alps', in: *The Independent on Sunday*, September 29, 1991.

<sup>54</sup> For a good account of the main arguments in this controversy see: 'Frevel bleibt Frevel, und wenn es eine Mehrheit ist', in: *FF*, No.9, 1993, p.35.

two years the SVP has been active in developing a law proposal that aims at giving exclusive preference to those names for towns and fields that are "rooted in the cultural history" (SVP-proposal) of the region<sup>55</sup>. This essentially means eliminating most of the Italian city names dictated by the fascist regime and stopping the practice of bilingual designation. The question, high on the political agenda of the *Heimatbund* and the SVP, is hence whether the enforced Italian names should simply be eliminated and the genuine German name used.

Surveys<sup>56</sup> on this issue indicate that the German parties' concern for this "crucial question for the people's identity" and the factual importance granted to this issue by the population, do not really correspond. For 51.4% of the German and 38.9% of the Italian population this issue is "rather unimportant". The absolute majority (70.9%) of both groups is in favor of leaving everything as it is. Here, even the German population, supposedly threatened in its ethnic identity by the 'Italianization' of their cultural heritage, agree that the principle of bilinguality should be kept in place (57,2%). The younger part of the population in South Tyrol is particularly disinterested in this language question. Amongst 18-34 year-olds, a minority of 41.6% considers this issue an important question. Further data from the survey confirm: the younger and the more educated people are, the less this aspect of cultural identity based on the language issue is of particular political significance. The quarrel about the city names, pictured by the parties as a crucial decision for the cultural identity of each language group, is in reality pacified by a general acceptance of the *status quo* amongst wide parts of the citizenry. Manifestly, there is a growing gap between the official political discourse<sup>57</sup> and the actual cultural self-assessment of people in their lifeworld contexts<sup>58</sup>.

The following more radical thesis can thus be formulated: The belonging to an ethnically assigned language community is, particularly for the next generations, of little concern in terms of its cultural identity. The ethnically defined features of belonging,

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<sup>55</sup> See: 'Ortsnamen als kulturelle Frage', in: *Volksbote*, March 4, 1993.

<sup>56</sup> The following figures come from a survey conducted in late 1993; they were published in: *FE*, 'Die Kraft des Faktischen', No.8, August 1993, p.30-31.

<sup>57</sup> A. Benedikter, for instance, responds to the question of whether a campaign for the exclusiveness of German town names may not be obsolete as follows: "We simply cannot give up this task. Otherwise we would give up our identity" ('Kompromiß ist Volksbetrug', in: *FE*, No.34, 1993).

<sup>58</sup> This seems to be also the case for the question of regional independence. Surveys indicate that regarding this critical concern of territorial politics is of minor importance for the majority of the population. Only 8% stated to be in favor of a regional independence and 80% said they approve the present status of the region (Source: DOXA; published in *L'Espresso*, No.9, 1991).

however, become of major concern where they serve as a basis for determining social and economic group entitlements. This issue hence becomes significant at the point where concrete resources are concerned. The collective identity is about to turn into a medium of calculating interests. The underlying concern for the preservation of an ethnically framed cultural identity, formerly serving as the legitimating base, is of less and less relevance for the new generations. Instrumentally guided political action and the legitimating discourse on a primordial collective identity are no longer genuinely linked.

Another broader survey gives more insight into this transformation process of the political attitude of the South Tyrolean population and its reaction to the agenda set by the primordial collective identity. Asked what they perceive as the most important problems to be solved by their politicians the South Tyrolean interviewees said the following<sup>59</sup>: issues genuinely linked to the ethnically defined dividing line in South Tyrol rank only ninth and tenth (the issue of communal coexistence considered 53% and the protection of minority rights only 47% as a major task for regional politics). High ranking themes, and thus high on the agenda of the people, are on the contrary those which do not show any distinct reference to a form of ethnically defined collective identity. The most pressing issues concern the environment: 79% of the interviewees regard a solution to the traffic problem and 72% the environmental questions in general as most important. Next to these themes the concern for jobs (75%), for health (68%), for the care for elderly people (61%), for housing construction (58%) and for the vocational training of the youth have priority amongst the citizens in the region. Revealingly, in 1986 the question of how to solve the problem of the co-existing language groups scored second on the priority list of South Tyrolese.

It is not that the SVP has simply failed to discern this substantial shift in the voters' concern about political issues. Its political program is indeed designed to portray the party of the German population as a political force largely concerned with environmental problems and occupational concerns. Reacting to the rapid rise of the Green party the SVP has sought to integrate this concern into its own agenda and thereby to maintain its claim that it adequately represents all interests within its ethnically assigned constituency. As the dominant frame of reference in re-formulating its integrating collective identity and the related political agenda,

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<sup>59</sup> The survey was published in: FF, 'Das erwarten sich die Wähler', No.44, 1993, p.21-24.

however, the defense of the minority rights clearly remained dominant<sup>60</sup>. Its replacement is hardly feasible within the political scope established by the integrating collective identity.

As already postulated in theoretical terms above, the difficulties in conducting a convincing modernization of the party in terms of a programmatic re-orientation are far from superficial to the political identity of the SVP. A radical transformation of its frames is hampered by the dominant patterns of its primordially integrated collectivity. Given the nature of its collective identity the political fate of the SVP is essentially dependent on the virulence of the conflict that the 'People's Party' seeks to settle in contractual agreements with the Italian government. It is only as long as the features of integration are perceived by the German population as highly conflictual and under constant jeopardy that the SVP can justify its political preponderance<sup>61</sup>.

### **8.6. The Crisis in Italian Politics, the Rise of the Lega and the Reaction in South Tyrol**

The reaction of the SVP to the considerable re-organization of the Italian political system in general and the rise of the Lega Nord in particular sheds further light on the programmatic inflexibility established by the nature of its collective identity. Although cooperating with the Lega in a European context, their political rejection of the Lega was unequivocal. Bossi's movement was perceived as a political force incompatible with their own political identity.

In essence, the reservation vis-à-vis the Lega was formulated regarding three major factors. First, there is the issue of the populist and unpredictable form of the Lega's mobilization and political orientation that, for an established and deeply conservative party such as the SVP, was obviously unacceptable. Bossi is characterized by Magnago as "fanatic"

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<sup>60</sup> At the end of one of the SVP's reports on its future political guidelines it programmatically says: "As a party with historic consciousness in the future the SVP will continue to defend South Tyrol's ties to the German cultural realm and to our protector Austria as well as nourishing the spiritual and cultural unit Tyrol." ('Auch das Edelweiß ist eine Blume. SVP: Gestern - Heute - Morgen', Landesleitung der SVP Bozen, 1990.

<sup>61</sup> Not being able to sustain its ideological hegemony, the SVP is now considering changing the electoral system on a regional and provincial level in conformity with the majoritarian system already applied at the national level. This would probably preserve for some time its domination in the Alto Adige. See: A. Maier, 'Der Verordnete Wahlsieg', in: *FF*, No.4, January, 1994.

and "uncontrollable"<sup>62</sup>. The second factor is the politically more significant dispute over a concrete scheme for a federalized country. With the Lega gradually abandoning the classical agenda of regional self-determination and adopting the idea of a federalization of the country on the basis of 'macro-regions', spokesmen of the SVP articulated major doubts as to whether the political goals of the two organizations are compatible. The weakening of the central government in Rome was welcomed by the 'People's Party'. On the other hand, however, for the SVP the idea of the macro-regions as the modern form of national decentralization insinuated the image of a new form of 'foreign rule'. It asked what difference it would make if it was ruled by Rome, by Milan or by Venice (the designated capital of the north-east macro-region). The SVP argued that it would not solve any of the problems of the language minority in the Alps. Administrative units that are determined by practical-political considerations rather than by ethnic standards will obviously not be supported by the advocate of the German minority. The last factor is simply that the Lega is a serious adversary in electoral terms.

The harsh reaction of the SVP's representatives indicates, beyond personal animosities, that the Lega is perceived as a serious political agent competing for consensus also amongst the German-speaking population. According to surveys in the region in early 1993 the Lega could count on a much higher margin of support than it actually achieved at a later point in time. Of particular significance for the ethnically based political model of the SVP is the fact that over 50% of the potential voters of the Lega come from the German-speaking population<sup>63</sup>. What is astonishing considering the traditional ethnic split in voting behavior is that 13% of the Germans stated that they would personally vote for the Lega, a political force of genuine Italian origin and directed in its political aspirations towards Rome<sup>64</sup>.

Based on the insights of the two case studies a substantiated explanation of why forms of cooperation are considered only very reluctantly by both political forces can be generated, in spite of the apparent common political denominator they have in their programmatic orientation. This lies in the essentially different forms of collective identity and the political approaches based on them. Commenting on the major differences between the two political

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<sup>62</sup> 'Magnago contro Bossi: è un fanatico', in: *Corriere della Sera*, November 8, 1993. In his accusations against Bossi Magnago primarily attacks the Lega's "racist" anti-southern feelings and the call for fiscal disobedience that is perceived as illegal and illegitimate.

<sup>63</sup> See: 'Die Lega spricht deutsch', in: *FF*, No.27, 1993.

<sup>64</sup> See: 'Wie geht's dem Nachwuchs?', in: *FF*, No.6, 1993, p.14ff.

forces Magnago points to the SVP's character as an 'ethnic party'<sup>65</sup>. Without specifying the Lega's political identity he simply asserts the general incompatibility of both approaches. In his perspective the divergence is manifestly not rooted in conflicting perceptions of single issues but in a dissimilarity in the underlying constitution of the two 'regionalist' forces.

One revealing feature in this respect is the way in which the two forces have reacted to the current political crisis in Italy. It has become manifest how inflexible the collective identity of the SVP is in reacting to changes in the general political environment. The traditional regionalist party has not benefitted from the prevailing delegitimation of the establishment. Rather, its reactions have mainly been defensive, particularly regarding institutional and electoral reform. The '*regioni a stato speciale*' (regions with special status) are actually threatened by the introduction of the majoritarian system because with the reform the former guarantee, that these regions have a certain number of MPs, may be abolished. Within the region itself the SVP has been troubled by the growing mistrust vis-à-vis the 'political class'. Although not directly involved in the scandals of *tangentopoli*, the legitimation of the SVP's power base that has lasted for almost five decades in the region has come under pressure. Widely, the SVP is perceived as a political force representing the 'old' party structure of the First Republic. Unlike the Lega, the regionalist regime in Bozen could not benefit from the legitimation crisis of its historic adversaries in Rome.

### 8.7. Conclusions: A Future Scenario of Territorial Politics in South Tyrol

Recent political developments in South Tyrol give evidence of a significant change in the foundations of South Tyrolean politics. The all-embracing integrating power of the dominant ethno-regionalist party seems to be on the verge of depletion. The dilemma for a distinctly primordially sanctioned political force such as the SVP can be formulated as follows: on the one hand, it has to accept the imperatives of modernization and the consequences that result from the region's exposure to outside influences. The regime in South Tyrol and most parts of the wider regionalist movement have sought to productively tackle this phenomenon. For instance, there is virtual consensus amongst the political forces that integration into the European Union should be perceived as an opportunity rather than

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<sup>65</sup> 'Magnago contro Bossi', *ibid.*

as a threat<sup>66</sup>. Along the same lines an educational training program is underway that puts emphasis on 'standard German' as a communicative ability<sup>67</sup>. Isolation, in political-economic or cultural terms, is widely conceived of as a real threat. Degeneration into a folkloristic and marginal subculture for the tourist business could well be the future for South Tyrol<sup>68</sup>.

On the other hand, however, this indispensable openness towards the outer world, the option for an active integration into an internationalized global society, threatens to undermine the very collective identity on which the regionalist claims were traditionally based. The boundaries towards the 'Other' become less well-defined and features of communal identification tend to lose their significance in lifeworld experience. Primordial collective identities are manifestly dependent on these symbolic and ritual practices by which feelings of common belonging are generated. Birth and blood relationships, however, are as such impotent to manufacture relevant consequence for collective and individual attitudes and political behavior. They need to be constantly confirmed by visible signs and concrete experiences of their assigned members. Like other forms of collective identity, primordial codes are critically dependent on the continuous symbolic affirmation in public discourse in order to secure the maintenance of their meaning in their assigned member's perception of reality. This is precisely the problem that primordially integrated communities have to face. South Tyrol is a striking example of how the daily practice of the individuals - their education, jobs and consumption pattern - make the suggested non-reflexive affiliation to the regional community increasingly less convincing. Accordingly, political loyalty to the SVP is no longer firmly perceived as a matter of birth-given fate but of a genuine political decision.

The difficulties of the classical regionalist party SVP in stabilizing the political mobilization on which its success has traditionally been built, can thus be identified in two major points. Both are rooted in the basic elements of a primordial collective identity that is no longer able to serve as an overarching legitimating frame for the SVP's political struggle.

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<sup>66</sup> See in this respect the considerations of the head of regional government (*Landeshauptmann*) Durnwalder, 'Vor einem neuen, hoffnungsvollen Kapitel für Tirol', in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 18, 1994.

<sup>67</sup> See on this debate concerning the use of standard German and the still highly important local dialect as well as the underlying menace of a *kulturelle Abschnürung* (cultural separation): Hosp (1986).

<sup>68</sup> One crucial problem widely discussed in this context is the role of the dialect that is still the dominant form of communication in daily life. In public discourse the emphasis on standard German is perceived as a dilemma between jeopardizing the indigenous culture and identity on the one hand, and the need to cooperate with the (European) environment.

Firstly, there is the gradual weakening of those ties that have traditionally secured the socialization and integration into the established identity pattern. The new generations in particular feel increasingly alienated from forms of communal belonging that are not based on discursively generated consensus but on habitually reproduced traditions and routines on ethnic grounds. The closely related second point concerns the political aspects of the SVP's likely evolution: this is the limited range of political options resulting from the very nature of the SVP's political identity. Although far more gradually than the Lega Nord, the SVP has reached a point at which its political orientation needs to be reconsidered. The political fight of this party, being determined by a decreasingly plausible collective identity, no longer firmly reflects the primary political concerns of the German population. In contrast to the Lega, it has not the means at its disposal to transform its underlying collective identity in such a way as to effectively meet its present legitimation crisis.

In its attempt to bring its overarching primordial collective identity in a credible alignment with its political orientation, the SVP faces another critical challenge to its hegemony. The reinforcing reason behind the weakened integrative political power of this classical regionalist is the gradual loss of a strong enemy. The rationale of a polarized fight between the Roman center and the deprived region has lost great parts of its mobilizing energy. Reflecting the salience of the binary code in the integrating collective identity, the basis of the hegemonic claims of the SVP was based on the primary political opposition against the Italian nation-state. With this clearly specified 'enemy', in a dialectic movement, the political identity was founded. The agreement with Rome and the *de facto* cooperative interaction with the Italian population in daily life, the legitimating recourse to the all overriding conflict between two (or three) ethnic groups necessarily becomes less pressing. Political issues are no longer dominated by this conflict. The political aims of the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* are decreasingly confirmed by a 'settled culture' (Swidler 1986) in which the undisputed authority of tradition and common sense traditionally produced critical legitimating resources for this regionalist force. On an ideological level, the patterns of primordial features of belonging are no longer able to generate the form of emotional identification that has traditionally integrated the German community and has spurred political mobilization in South Tyrol. The Italian environment is no longer naturally perceived as hostile and incompatible the own identity. The interpretative frames genuinely connected to a primordial collective identity have lost their once substantial 'narrative fidelity' (Snow & Benford 1988), opening up new opportunities for competing discourses.

Based on these reflections the future prospects for territorial politics in South Tyrol can be described as follows: the logic on which this region's primordial collective identity was traditionally built, has lost its integrative power. The possibility of sustaining an ethnically based model of attachment to the territorially defined community is highly restricted, particularly for the younger generations. Primordial features may, in exceptional situations such as in the revolutionary transformations in Eastern Europe, gain a transitory political significance. In West European societies, however, genuine political issues are gradually replacing ethnic loyalties as the dominant moment in the formation of political preferences. For the long-term development of a modern society they are neither normatively nor functionally a feasible possibility. In this respect the predictions of modernization theory are still valid.

For the political future of a dominant regionalist force such as the SVP whether it will be able to react constructively to this challenge will prove decisive. A determining point will be whether the regionalist regime is able to adopt elements of a civic form of collective identity as a legitimating basis. As the analysis of the very core of the SVP's and the wider regionalist movement's collective identity has, however, made clear, there are rigid structural restrictions to an expansion towards a civically integrated form of societal integration and political representation. Traditionally, political loyalties to the advocate of the German-speaking community are systematically built on features of birth and strict ethnic belonging. The ties between the SVP and the German community are based on the uncontested validity of the ethnically defined dividing lines between the language communities. Any attempt to turn them into more reflexive and culturally debatable categories of collective belonging would logically imply a substantial weakening of those features on which territorial politics is based in South Tyrol.

For this reason the regionalist regime cannot simply adopt elements of a civic form of collective identity. A lessening of the strictly signified boundaries and a more open conception of the defining features of membership would unavoidably weaken the legitimating base of the overarching primordial collective identity. Civic criteria of belonging would, in fact, undermine the very logic on which the claims of such an actor are based. A primordially framed identity is dependent on the clear and undebatable notion of belonging. However, birth and blood relationships cannot be made subject of a relativistic discourse without destroying its rationale.

## Chapter IX

### **Conclusions. Territorial Politics in Comparative Perspective**

The logic of the formation of collective action has significantly altered with the decline of class determined political conflict. The fabrication of an integrative collective identity - indispensable pre-political foundation of any collective actor in territorial politics that is constituted beyond face-to-face relationships - is following new patterns. The erosion of traditional social milieus and the concomitant processes of an intensified individualization have changed the conditions under which collective action is forged. Next to and increasingly more successful than the old class cleavage, identity based political projects, situated in a lifeworld context, have significantly impacted on politics in contemporary Western society. Different forms of collective identity have been able to substantially redefine traditional political allegiances, appealing predominantly to the middle class. Identity projects hereby often react upon the deepening alienation from 'official', party-based politics which characterizes the political attitude of an important part of this social group.

Territorial politics has gained a particular prominence in this context. Features of communal belonging have proven to be a promising ideological tool to mobilize protest against national political regimes and to challenge established loyalties to traditional parties. By providing clear-cut criteria for inclusion and exclusion and the related polarizing political approach, a territorially defined collective identity is able to benefit from a vacuum in politics left behind by declining traditional collective actors. Notwithstanding the factual deterioration of traditionally integrated communities, the longing for communal belonging and territorial politics' promise for less anonymous social relations have become a critical resource in fabricating political mobilization in modern society. The territorially defined collective identity manifestly represents an effective consensual foundation on the basis of which new interest structures are formulated and lines of political conflict are re-defined.

However, territorial politics is everything but a label pointing to homogeneous political actors with identical patterns of political mobilization. As is manifest in the Italian case, already on the phenomenologic level empirical evidence gives substance to the postulate that we actually face a wide range of political aspirations quite diverse in character that are subsumed under this category. Dominant scholarship has not come to terms with this, indicating a critical methodological problem in studying territorial politics. Applying empirically unsatisfactorily informed interpretive schemes, the actual processes of political

mobilization mostly remains beyond the analytical scope of mainstream research in this field. Confronting this endemic inadequacy it becomes necessary to study territorial movements without presupposing an *a-priori* meaning and by illuminating the concrete processes and consequences of these actors on the macrosocial level. The Italian Northern leagues can in this context be seen as an example for political mobilization on the grounds of a territorial collective identity that goes beyond the interpretive reach set out by traditional approaches to regionalism or nationalism. Regarding the scope as the political orientation, its mobilization patterns do not follow the logic laid out in traditional conceptualizations of regionalist politics.

It hence proved necessary to develop an analytical scheme for studying territorial politics beyond the unfruitful alternative between a strict macro-structural approach and one-sided focus on mobilization processes on the micro level. Neither can macrosocial changes as such explain mobilization processes along a territorially defined collective identity, nor can these processes be accurately studied by drawing exclusive attention to the interaction on the level of the individual actor. Rather, in an action theoretical perspective, the intermediate meso level of analysis needs to be recognized in its critical role of forming and reproducing collective action. To grasp the specific quality of the political mobilization it turned out to be necessary to shed analytical light on how a particular socio-cultural action space is fabricated in which collective action is bred. In this, particular attention needs to be devoted to those social processes by which the image of the collective identity are symbolically communicated and conflictualized.

Of critical importance in conceptualizing the concrete formation of conditions conducive to collective action on the meso level is the formation and politicization of a sense of collective identity. The thesis is that successful collective action depends on the generation and conflictualization of images of collective identity. In processes of social communication a consensus is symbolically fabricated, assigning meaning to new collective agents. In this sense, collective identity is analytically considered a constitutive element of collective action beyond face-to-face settings, rather than perceived as a side-effect of political action. The focal point of empirical research hence is the issue of how the collective identity give meaning to its basic codes of boundary construction and how it is reproduced in a particular socio-political environment. For this, a systematic study was conducted to see how new identities are spread and systems of meaning are established in opposing dominant public discourse. In this perspective, the generation and conflictualization of forms of collective

identities was conceptualized in being essentially related to the 'opportunity structure' in the political sphere. The resonance which a collective identity can find in a politically meaningful way and the extent to which its framing of reality is able to provide the ground for redefining political loyalties depends on the specific political opportunities. However, the dynamic of identity construction is not unilaterally determined. The formation of a collective identity is consecutively a critical force in re-defining these opportunities and constraints for political mobilization.

With respect to these theoretical considerations, the aim of the case studies was to demonstrate the validity of a revised analytical model for collective action. It was claimed to be better capable of interpreting forms of territorial politics, the specificity of their political mobilization generated and political orientation taken. The central thesis is that a particular form of collective identity, understood as the constitutive process in the formation of collective action, determines patterns of political mobilization. Through the particular integrative codes and the nature of the boundaries demarcating the symbolically assigned community, different political actors with distinct political options are constituted. The symbolic practice of self-presentation, denoting the constitutive elements of the collective identity, sets the range of feasible option by which the course of political mobilization is conditioned. As such, images of collective identity are a structuring principle of macrosocial change.

Regarding the Italian case, the *Lega* and the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* are examples of the ideal types of collective identity developed in the theoretical section<sup>1</sup>. The primordial form of collective identity in South Tyrol and the cultural one in Northern Italy document how the basic cognitive codes in generating the sense of communal belonging essentially shape processes of political mobilization. The determining mechanisms of in- and exclusion lay out the scope in which the collective identity can be made subject to a politicizing dynamic. The nature of the political discourse and the targeted constituency are structured by the character of the respective image of collective identity. Its nature sets those limits which mark the feasible political option of the respectively integrated collective actor. The figure on the following page summarizes the main features of political mobilization that are present in the cases under investigation, comparing them with reference to the ideal-type distinction of forms of collective identity.

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<sup>1</sup> The primordial, cultural and civic type of collective identity were distinguished in Chapter 5.3.2.

**Figure I: The Lega Nord and the Südtiroler Volkspartei in Comparison**

	<b>Lega Nord</b>	<b>Südtiroler Volkspartei</b>
Type of collective identity	Cultural collective identity	Primordial collective identity
Defining feature in communal integration	Features of communality based on properties of cultural belonging; notion of superiority of own culture	Ethnic and language-based communal belonging; territorial identity based on non-reflexive integration into traditionally reproduced lifeworld
Constitutive boundaries	Northern Work Ethics; Demarcation from southern mentality and national political elite of the First Republic	Birth into German language and culture; belonging to indigenous Tyrolian society by descent
Constituency potentially to be included into mobilization	Given collective identity's inherent missionary attitude and lack of ethnical criteria of belonging, potentially entire population	Applied primordial features of belonging restrict potential constituency to ethnically assigned core group
Primary Political programme/ aims	'Integral Federalism'; re-organization of national political system towards decentralization; Communitarian populism: fight against political establishment	Strengthening political and socio-economic position of German part of the population; possibly independence or autonomy from Italian nation-state
Main socio-political conditions favorable for rise of movement	Decline of old party establishment; ideological de-polarization; enlarging legitimation crisis of established national political system	Strong collective memory of suppression of German minority in Italian nation-state during fascism; discriminatory structures in post-war Italian society vis-à-vis German community
Long-term political aspirations	Power in national government; endeavor to become leading political force in the institutional transformation of the national political system	Regional self-determination in European context; affirmative actions for securing and expanding socio-economic entitlement of German community
Range and stability of feasible political mobilization	Not geographically restricted mobilization, however, endemic instability of assigned political constituency	Constant, but highly limited scope of mobilization; comparatively stable political alignment
Actual performance	Capitalizing on crisis of Italian politics as new force; extraordinarily successful mobilization in northern Italy; with deepening institutionalization frustrated expansion of political mobilization	After far-reaching agreement with Italian government loss of integrating political power; gradual decrease of unconditional political support among German population

In order to understand the structural impact of the image of collective identity on the mobilization process attention needs to be given to the basic codes by which communal integration is secured and the boundaries between the in- and outside is marked. In the case of the SVP as a representative of the primordial type of collective identity, the determining criterion for inclusion is birth within the indigenous society. As documented in the analysis of the current crisis of the regional regime, the rationale of a primordial identity is highly dependent on the invariant standards constituted by ethnical descent. Images of communal belonging are consequently created by the notion of a categorical incompatibility of the 'We' and what, on ethnic grounds, is perceived as alien to it. The foreigner is genuinely perceived as a threat. At best, he can be tolerated in his difference but never become a member of the assigned community. The scope of the potential constituency for political mobilization is hence rigidly laid out and, by definition, exempted from any essential change.

Just the opposite logic is at work in the case of the Lega. The cultural collective identity is constituted by the 'competitive' interaction with other models of communal belonging. Not a rigid and in ethnic terms 'objectively' based demarcation as in the primordial case but a form of intrinsically missionary notion of superiority characterizes the attitude towards the 'Other' of this type of collective identity. The expansion of the promoted societal model and the corresponding integration of new members on the basis of the dominant cultural values is hence an integral part of its rationale. Regarding the latent potential for widening the assigned community it is worth recalling from the theoretical chapter that boundaries of this type of collective identity towards the 'Outside' are subject to substantial processes of re-definition. They can be re-interpreted in harmony with strategic changes regarding the political aims legitimated on the grounds of the integrating collective identity. Not being based on 'essentialist' features, their criteria are subject to an ongoing process of redefinition in public discourse.

Regarding the feasible range of each movement's mobilization potential in terms of integrating different social groups into their frame of collective identity and hence their political project, the options of both collective actors are apparent. The constituency that can potentially be included into the respective mobilization effort is far more restricted in the case of a primordial collective identity.

**Table II:** Comparison between the Lega and the Südtiroler Volkspartei concerning their capacity to integrate different groups into their identity-based political project<sup>2</sup>

	<b>Lega Nord</b>	<b>Südtiroler Volkspartei</b>
Ethnically attributed resident	Yes (but no decisive criterium)	Yes
Native resident in region (not belonging to indigenous ethnic group)	Yes	Excluded (In exceptional cases possible)
Non-native resident	Possible (Likely)	Excluded
Non-native northern Italian resident	Possible	Excluded
Southern Italian resident	Possible	Excluded
Non-native European resident	Possible	Excluded
Third World immigrant	Possible (not likely)	Excluded

As Figure II shows, in the South Tyrolian case only those with the ethnical attributes, those who dispose of the socially quasi unattainable qualities by birth, can possibly be integrated into a regionalist political project. In the South Tyrolian case the territorial identity sets severe geographical restrictions on a political mobilization based upon these features. With the plausible exception of some rare cases of non-native residents who undergo a thorough socialization process, any further integration of 'outsiders' (in strict ethnically phrased terms) would unavoidably undermine the potency of the symbolically reproduced boundaries. The forthright denial of inclusion for everyone beyond the birth given bonds of belonging is in fact the primary and exclusive means to reproduce the sense of communality.

The cultural type of collective identity as represented by the Lega is manifestly far more flexible in allowing non-native individuals to become part of the assigned symbolic community and hence of the political movement on which it is based. The image of community employed becomes open, relativistic and (or even) voluntaristic, unrestrained by

<sup>2</sup> This model takes patterns from what Diani has developed in another context (Diani 1994).

the ascribed status of language of birth, family or locality. The common identity is sustained by the sharing of beliefs and objectives and in putting these cultural values into political action. Depending on the concrete features of the cultural boundaries, the entire population could potentially be included (in the figure the most mature state of the Lega's political development is portrayed). The cultural identity does not deductively impose social and geographical restriction on the political constituency. On the contrary, the culturally assigned community can easily be redefined in terms of a broadening of the targeted constituency. The missionary attitude, generated by the very logic of the cultural collective identity, implicitly formulates a platform for the widening of the 'in-group'.

Surely, as the case of the Lega indicates, there are certain limits to integrating new members into the political project. Any broadening of the constituency unavoidably threatens to weaken the sense of boundaries that is indispensable for a territorially shaped collective identity. The less distinct the symbolic and ritual confirmation of the boundaries of the assigned community becomes, the less strong are the features of integration. To sustain its political mobilization the Lega has to constantly reproduce the notion of superiority, which demarcates the community vis-à-vis the 'profane' and corrupt nation-state center. Its moral crusade, epitomizing the core idea of the cultural form of collective identity, depends on a convincing picture of the 'Non-We' as the object of missionary aspirations. Still, notwithstanding these endemic risks of blurring the demarcating boundaries to the 'Other', structurally the collective identity, on which the Lega's political mobilization is based, does not impede the development of widely applicable standards of inclusion.

Matching these features regarding the feasible constituency, the essentially different logic of political mobilization present in the two cases finds its expression in the political framing conducted by both territorial movements. The specific type of collective identity originates a particular logic of political mobilization. The political agenda of the SVP is, given the character of its collective identity, restricted in its scope and determined by the narrowly defined interests of its constituency. The case of South Tyrol reflects in this respect the classical patterns of traditional regionalism that is basically characterized by the institutionalized ("civilized") fight for minority rights and autonomy from the nation-state. The political identity of this regionalist force is determined by the image of a virtually irreconcilable distinctiveness of the own community vis-à-vis the dominant nation-state. The national environment is hereby instrumentally perceived as providing the means to promote additional rights of the indigenous population, not as subject to further and more ambitious

aspirations in national politics. As representative of primordial forms of collective identity, the focal point in the political campaigns of the SVP lies on securing the political as socio-economic rights of the ethnically assigned group. The scenario of regional politics in South Tyrol is accordingly shaped by the fight over group entitlements amongst the German and Italian population in a geographically clearly defined realm.

The political agenda of the Lega, on the other hand, is not bound solely to the defense of group entitlement on the basis of a territorially conceived community. The principle of territoriality becomes a symbolic *chiffre* for justifying wider political goals than suggested in the fight for regional self-determination. The categorization as a form of 'communitarian populism' was designed to show how the image of communal belonging is strategically used in a form of political mobilization that exceeds what is traditional known as regionalism. National politics and more particularly, the governing establishment, become the primary target of the politicizing effort and, in polemically attacking the established elite, the very source of its political identity. At the core of the Lega's discourse stands the critique of organizing modern political reality. In its approach the Lega effectively combines a populist critique of 'official politics' with a *voto di appartenenza* - a form of political allegiance constituted by strong features of communal belonging. The main political goals are meant to provide a blueprint of change for the entire society, not for the territorial entity, which on its part primarily serves as a reference point in formulating the collective identity. In its latest phase of mobilization, the territorially framed collective identity served to give the populist protest against the nation-state elite a strong ideational communitarian basis.

This opens up a wide range of political options, which, however, have in common the aim of establishing a opposing political force in explicit competition with the national mass parties. Manifestly, the political mobilization originated on these grounds by the Lega was able to develop a dynamic, incomparable to the one to be found in the case of South Tyrol. Reacting upon a legitimation crisis of the political establishment in Italy, which in its magnitude is unique in Western Europe, the Lega could present itself as the main force of national opposition. The Lega was able to go beyond its original geographical realm of influence, expanding its targeted sphere of influence from single northern regions ideally to the entire Italian territory. This marks a political option which by definition is beyond what is feasible for a regionalist force such as the SVP.

It emerges from the case studies that on the contrary the potential electorate of the SVP and other traditional regionalist parties is far more limited and, at the same time, stable. It is very unlikely that, except for some more radical, albeit minor splinter groups, an established regionalist party such as the SVP entirely loses its strong support amongst those, which it claims to represent. The image of collective identity to be found in the South Tyrolian case has generated a strong continuity in the ideological and organizational features of its political engagement. Given the institutional setting in South Tyrol, the community's socializing mechanisms assigned by the language and cultural habits still represent a momentous element in the reproduction of the primordial identity. However, in a long term perspective, the ethos of its political identity has proven not to be flexible enough to productively react upon the newly emerging challenges in Italian politics. A collective identity, even if being rationalized on supposedly eternal grounds, needs to be confirmed on a steady basis to remain credible. Notwithstanding the claim to promote a-historic communal rights, a primordial collective identity is essentially a social construction, the salience of which critically depends on the continuous ritual and symbolic re-affirmation.

On this premise the main difficulty of the SVP to sustain its political loyalty on a long term basis can be analyzed. Features such as the gradual modernization and the economic and cultural opening towards the European environment, tend to gradually undermine the reproductive structures, on which the stability of the primordial was traditionally built. The history-based narratives and sacrosanct ties to the ethnic community are gradually losing their decisive impact on the younger generations. As a consequence, the primordial bonds become subject to a discursive process of justification, which as such already undermines the very logic of this form of collective identity, i.e., the spontaneous and non-reflexive image of communal belonging. At the point at which the formerly manufactured unquestioned preeminence of the 'ethnic issue' is no longer firmly propagated, the primordially justified regionalist regime is judged on the same grounds as competing parties. The 'natural' political allegiance on behalf of the ethnically assigned population becomes a matter of the past. For the younger generations in particular, the features of primordial belonging no longer possess the "narrative fidelity" as it does for those socialized in the post-war era. With the stable agreement on the minority status of the Germans in the Italian nation-state, the integration into the ethnically specified community has lost its existential quality once assigned to it. Not at least against the background of the agreement with the Roman government about the

minority status of the language groups, being German is no longer a part of the personal identity which determines political loyalty.

To adequately understand the nature of the crisis of the primordial form of collective identity a theoretical consideration is instructive. In modern society the authority of norms and institutions can only be legitimized by distinct political decisions. In contemporary society, political institutions are dependent on a genuine reflexive form of legitimation. On these grounds, primordial features no longer provide sufficient legitimating resources to sustain existing power structures. Primordially formulated features of ethnic belonging in the form of non-reflexive bonds and the related non-discursively legitimized pattern of inequality can no longer serve as a firm basis for political power. Distinct political criteria instead of traditional reproduced common habits need to be employed to establish a basis for social integration appropriate for modern society.

The hegemonic role of the SVP is predominantly based on such traditionally reproduced and habitually confirmed features of communal integration. Any loosening of the pre-political sense of immediate belonging to the ethnically assigned community has hence serious repercussions on the legitimating grounds of its political claims. Here it is important to be aware of the endemic limitations the SVP has to face concerning its capacity to essentially redefine the rationale of its political discourse. The attempt to simply replace the conventionally generated political allegiances by claims on the basis of genuine political issues is highly difficult to conduct. Such a step would tend to undermine the very source of the SVP's political affirmation. The regionalist party would jeopardize the "pre-political" source of its approval, being judged rather on the basis of its concrete political options than on the grounds of an unquestioned primacy of primordial bounds. It is with regard to the legitimating discourse of these two levels that the SVP has recently had to face a gradual disintegration of its hegemonic position. The assigned constituency, bound to an increasingly lesser extent to the 'ethnic community', orient themselves more towards genuine political issues relating to which they formulate their political preferences. Only the introduction of civically conceived standards of belonging would match the legitimating claims raised by the disintegrating features of the primordially stabilized model of societal integration. Given the very logic on which such a primordial form of collective identity is based, this shift would mean entirely re-interpreting those processes by which the community is assigned and in- and exclusion are regulated.

On the basis of its cultural collective identity, on the contrary, historically the Lega was significantly more successful in convincingly propagating its project during the course of its mobilization. Its collective identity was structurally far more flexible in conducting a successful frame alignment, i.e., to render its view on reality harmonious with the challenges it faces in the course of its mobilization. The flexible adaptation of the cultural collective identity to the challenges of the different stages of the Lega's mobilization proved to be a critical means of constantly re-affirming the correspondence between the movement's political aspirations and the constituency's value orientation. As the mobilization history of the Lega shows: the less the collective identity is dependent on stable social structures for its reproduction and hence the more it is symbolically generated in public discourse as a notion of cultural belonging, the more flexibly it can be used as a strategic resource in political conflict. Substantial changes in its features are not likely to be perceived as an illegitimate incoherence. Rather, its fluid and inconsistent character is an effective cognitive means to integrate the changing expectations and orientations of the assigned constituency and to adopt to the altering challenges this collective actor meets in the course of its political mobilization.

The price of this flexibility, however, has been the endemic instability of the assigned constituency. The political identity of the Lega is forged in such a way that it is highly vulnerable to changes in the political opportunity structure. As has become obvious with the rise of *Forza Italia*, the Lega can not convincingly claim a monopoly in expressing anti-party sentiments. With its substantial shift away from a traditional ethno-regionalist movement towards a populist opposition on a national level, the Lega has become exposed to the challenging aspirations of political forces based on similar ideological features. Entering national government has especially changed the features of its political mobilization: From the non-negotiable identity of belonging to a culturally assigned community, its reference point in political mobilization has become subject to the interest-based bargaining in policy. Allowing on the one hand for a decisive broadening of its political mobilization, it has generated on the other hand severe risks that have come up in the course of the radical changes in Italian politics.

The reasons why the Lega became so vulnerable in its political mobilization when having decided to take political responsibility in government, can be traced to the pattern established in its collective identity. It was not only Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* which put severe restrictions on the further rise of the Lega on a national scale. The transition from an anti-system protest movement to a force in government was the main cause of this difficulty because the political

project based on a cultural collective identity simply does not provide a concrete scheme of political change. The systematically generated in-group feeling, the latent notion of cultural superiority of the own community, are conducive in polemically confronting the grievances within the Italian nation. However, the missionary attitude is not easy to translate into concrete political reforms, rendering the blueprint for a differently organized societal community more realistic. The programmatic immaturity and the vague reference to a federalized nation-state indicate this weakness.

Originally basing its collective identity primarily on an anti-party and 'anti-politics'<sup>3</sup> platform, the Lega became vulnerable to the consequences intrinsically linked to integration into the established political system. The main point is that the collective identity on which the political project of the Lega is based has not developed any procedural notion of what communal belonging explicitly signifies. The primarily cultural features do not dispose of internal standards of what it means to be member of the community. Rather, its idea of communal belonging is essentially composed by the symbolically communicated negative reference to the 'Other' - be it "Southerners", Immigrants or the political elite in Rome. In distinct contrast to a civically integrated counterpart the territorial identity to be found in the case of the Lega is not essentially built on procedural rules by which the boundaries of the collectivity are constituted. This can be identified as one main source of the difficulties this new agent in Italian politics has to face now, after having accepted political power in local and national administration. Civic rules would provide a blueprint for the reorganization of political structures. A cultural collective identity, however, that is primarily furnished by its outer relations and equipped only with a vague notion of an alternative concept of political representation, must perceive this step from populist protest to concrete political responsibility as a severe challenge to its credibility. This is why the actual performance of Lega administrations on the local level is of critical political significance at the moment. The experience so far indicates that the concrete organization of the internal order of communal life has in no way been an integral part of the political ideas of the Lega.

In discussing the political consequences of the different types of collective identity, it is important to be aware of one crucial point. The logic on which both are built has very distinct features which makes it difficult to simply use elements of each of them. In the case at stake,

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<sup>3</sup> For the notion of 'anti-politics' as a delineation of a populist opposition against the entire 'political class' see: Schedler (1994).

having traditionally based its political attraction on the belligerent demarcation from the 'Non-we', with its acceptance of political power the Lega faces major obstacles in making the features of the political goals (decentralization, federalism) the basis for political mobilization. Highly vague political notions had to be translated into concrete strategies of change in the policy process. The recent performance in national government gives evidence of this difficulty. On the one hand, having acquired the means to bring about substantial political change in different spheres of policy making, the Lega still defines its political identity almost uniquely via its opposition to the (supposedly) still potent old elite of the country. In the political practice of the present government this means that Berlusconi is able to pattern the important political decisions whereas Bossi, with some exceptions<sup>4</sup>, is maintaining a position of radical opposition regardless of its actual performance in government. Being part of national government, the Lega only very slowly develops political positions which go beyond the general political claim to represent the 'normal citizen' in the corrupt world of party politics. By this, the Lega conducts a political strategy that reflects the imperatives of its collective identity but that, on the other hand, is no longer effective in mobilizing political support as before. Ideologically, the Lega has not been able to organically link its originally vigorous call for "freedom of the northern people" with the mundane practice of governmental initiatives.

Regardless of the contemporary difficulties of the Lega in sustaining its political mobilization, primarily resulting from the endemic long-term deficiency of populist protest, its case has given evidence of the salience of territorial politics in modern society. The Italian case indicates how collective action can be generated on the basis of features of communal belonging. Politics based on collective identity is able to redefine those political alignments formerly shaped by class allegiances. By stipulating non-negotiable identities as the basis for protest formation, these movements formulate a highly productive political agenda in times of increasingly similar mass parties. Ascriptive categories of territorial belonging can gain new political significance with forms of social conflicts less shaped by grievances from the sphere of work.

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<sup>4</sup> The issues of federalism and a law on anti-trust fighting monopolistic power in different areas are the main concrete issues raised by the Lega. None of these, however, have become of particular significance in public discourse nor in policy making. Still, Bossi continues to define the Lega's political identity in terms of 'fundamental' change, describing its role in Berlusconi's government as to "control" *Forza Italia* and AN in superseding the First Republic.

Regarding the Italian case, it was manifestly the culturally integrated Lega which successfully redefined lines of political conflict. Not being dependent on tradition-sanctioned features of identity construction, it effectively used the collective identity as a form of protest far beyond conventional forms of regionalism. The Northern leagues show that feelings of communal belonging are everything but an outdated notion of contemporary politics. Being no longer determined by traditionally reproduced lifeworld settings and ethnic principles, notions of territorial belonging can more easily become a potent resource in modeling a basis for collective identity and in instigating forms of collective action. Given the characteristics of *de-structured* society these images are likely to persist as a critical principle in politics both, regarding their latent promise for democratic renewal and civic participation as regarding their less benevolent tendency to provide the basis for the (latent racist) exclusion of the 'foreigners'. In this respect, political aspirations based on notions of a strong territorial collective identity are prone to become a shaping force in contemporary West European politics.

## VI. Appendix

### Methodological Aspects:

Several methods have been employed in the course of this study. Initially I familiarized myself with the movement by participating in several protest actions. I then interviewed activists, leaders and simple supporters both informally, in the course of protest actions and casual conversations, and also formally after making fixed appointments, following specific guidelines and taping the interviews. Thirty-five such structured interviews were conducted with cadres, some with formal functions in the organization, such as provincial directors and other functionaries. These interviews were conducted in Florence, Bergamo, Como, Milano, Varese, Bolzano, Brixen and Meran.

In order to analyze articles of the **Corriere della Sera**, by conducting a computerized search I obtained a list of headlines of articles which appeared in the period 1983-1990 containing the word Lega Lombarda. This list also included a summary of the articles. I counted the articles and consulted a sample of them. Results are reported in table 1<sup>5</sup>. (See also Figure 1 in the main text).

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Name	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Lega Lombarda	6	3	3	12	47	67	217

**Table 1.** Corriere articles with "Lega Lombarda" in their headline

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I then proceeded to perform a frame analysis on the newspaper **La Repubblica**. The selection of the frames resulted from my underlying hypothesis that there is a correspondence between the issues raised by the Lega Lombarda and those stressed by the media. To be easily identifiable in the media, the ideological packages of the Lega had to be defined in a clear and concise way. To produce such a list of frames I examined various activist materials.

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<sup>5</sup> A similar analysis conducted by searching more generally for the word Lega and Leghe produced similar results; it is not reported because it is not possible to exclude the meaning of Leghe as metal leagues. However there is no reason to think that the reporting on metal leagues would change over time. An analysis of **Lega Veneto** showed that after a decline of interested in the mid eighties, reporting increased again in the last few years following the increasing popularity of the Lega Lombarda.

Handouts summarizing the political goals of this movement and the satirical monthly Quelli della Lega were particularly helpful. I formulated seven frames which I believe reflected adequately the crucial points of the Lega's political program.

As a next step in my analysis it was essential to minimize the measurement problems which necessarily arise in the evaluation of the content of articles. This meant first of all that those involved in the frame analysis, namely, the authors and an assistant, had to identify frames continuously. I addressed these problems of reliability with a two step strategy. Firstly, in the initial phase of the project, before the actual review of the material, I sought to achieve the best possible clarification of the meaning of concepts such as corruption or insufficiency of the political system' and by which criteria they were defined in an article. Subsequently, especially in the first couple of sessions, uncertain cases were discussed with collaborators<sup>6</sup>, referring to my analysis of activist materials, and in doing so I reformulated the definitions in a more appropriate, i.e., easily identifiable way. Secondly, I made two checks in the course of the study. For two months the same set of issues of the newspaper was analyzed independently by two persons and the results were compared. Since the rates of correspondence were 89% and 92% respectively, I considered the reliability level to be satisfactory.

Although I agree with those authors who conceptualize public opinion and media discourse separately, in selecting my sample, my aim was to find a source which reflected a wide range of opinions amongst the Italian public. The *La Repubblica* is a national newspaper in the liberal political spectrum that fits this requirement. It is published in Rome and thus does not generally focus on regional problems. Furthermore, it is not affiliated to a political party and, partly due to this, its circle of readers encompasses different social groups.

I chose for my purposes the opinions page (*l commenti*) since it appears a good indicator of the issues that are high on the public agenda. However, I do not want to suggest that this page reflects public opinion, but merely that it indicates the issues which are of concern to many people. The lay-out of the opinion page is fixed. It always features an editorial on the left of the page, which is sometimes written by prominent political or academic figures, a cartoon in the top center and below a main editorial article. On the right, there are letters by readers. The central position of this page in the newspaper, and its role as a forum for discussion, indicated this to be the best position to draw a picture commenting on the shifts in public concerns.

The task of the coders was to read the articles, identify the frames adopted, and decide whether an article matched one of the frames. I was not concentrating on identifying

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<sup>6</sup> Parts of the empirical research were done together with Carlo Ruzza and another collaborator.

competing frames, but I registered their rare occurrence. My main effort was to observe the content and the tone of the article against the dominant frames which I had already identified. This task was relatively straight forward. Entire articles or letters were my unit of analysis. As a rule, one article was classified into one of the frames when it matched the central statement of one of my categories. It turned out that only in a few cases were two frames present in one article or in a letter and hence I only seldomly counted it twice. Very seldom I encountered eclectic editorials that tackled several subjects in a cursory fashion; in such cases it was difficult to infer a clear message, I therefore discarded them from the analysis.

I estimated that a sample of three months per year was large enough to show the main topics which received public and media attention. By covering one quarter of a year I avoided the risk of merely reflecting the particular focus of a few issues. Accordingly, my data collection technique allowed an adequate survey of the year's main political themes.

The period of the study chosen concentrated mainly on the years in which the Lega had been becoming more successful (1985-1990). The years 1980 and 1983 were added to show in which way the media emphasis shifted over a longer period. Results are reported in Table 2.

Table 2 Repubblica Frames 1980-1990 according to different thematic fields

<u>Month/ Year</u>	Political Cor- ruption	Inefficient Political System	Total Political	Inadequate State Serv- ices	Waste of Public R- esources	Total Techni- cal	Monthly Tot.	Yearly Tot.
January 80	3	3	6	1	1	2	8	21
February 80	2	2	4	1	0	1	7	
March 80	2	1	3	1	2	3	6	
January 83	4	2	6	1	3	4	10	32
February 83	3	3	6	2	2	4	10	
March 83	3	4	7	3	2	5	12	
January 85	3	4	7	3	1	4	11	36
February 85	5	4	9	5	0	5	14	
March 85	3	1	4	2	5	7	11	
January 86	0	5	5	5	3	8	13	39
February 86	1	5	6	3	2	5	11	
March 86	2	6	8	5	2	7	15	
January 87	2	5	7	3	4	7	14	43
February 87	3	3	6	6	3	9	15	
March 87	2	4	6	5	3	8	14	
January 88	5	6	11	4	5	9	20	55
February 88	3	4	7	9	1	10	17	
March 88	6	6	12	4	2	6	18	
January 89	4	6	10	7	4	11	21	65
February 89	5	3	8	13	3	16	24	
March 89	3	4	7	11	2	13	20	
January 90	2	8	10	13	3	16	26	82
February 90	3	6	9	17	5	22	31	
March 90	1	9	10	14	1	15	25	

### The Programme of the Lega Lombarda

1. For a self-government of Lombardy the replacement of the centralized state by a modern federal state which knows how to respect all the peoples by which it is constituted.
2. For the affirmation of our culture, history, our Lombard language, and our social and moral values. Against any assault against the national identity of Lombardy. Because next to the <i>tricolore</i> the historic flag of Lombardy should always be exposed.
3. The preference for Lombard people in the allocation of jobs, housing, assistance and financial expenses. Because any taxation equal in all regions does not take into account that for instance the medical treatment in Lombardy costs half of what it costs in the south.
4. Because it is the fruit of their work the taxes should be controlled and managed by Lombards according to a administrative system similar to those established in Trentino and South Tyrol.
5. For the defense of a balanced development of the economy and agriculture: inalienable component of work and civilization of the Lombard people.
6. For a Lombard pension system that guarantees the pensions of our workers which are jeopardized by numerous invalidity pensions distributed in the south.
7. For a public administration and educational system regulated by Lombards instead of being degenerated as in the present.
8. For a law that allows our youth to perform their military service in Lombardy as is already possible for young men in South Tyrol.
9. For a Lombard legal system that efficiently and with adequate measures fights against the organized crime and the Mafia.
10. Against the devastation and selling of our soil, formed and defended by previous generations, a patrimony of which I have the duty to pass it to the following generations.
11. Against the opportunistic mentality of Roman parties, against the resulting degradation of Lombardy.
12. For a Europe based on the principle of autonomy, on federalism, on the respect for and solidarity amongst all the peoples and hence between Lombardy and any other people.

**Table 3:** Distribution of articles in the Lombardia Autonomista/ Lega Nord according to regionalist and national concerns in the period of 1987 - 1992.

	Regionalist framing					National framing			
	Reg. (a)	Immi (b)	Disr (c)	Reg. (d)	total	Pol. (e)	Econ (f)	Pub. (g)	total
87'	10	8	20	13	51	3	2	8	13
88'	9	11	21	16	57	5	4	5	14
89'	7	17	18	11	53	7	3	7	17
90'	4	19	19	9	51	13	6	7	26
91'	3	11	12	10	36	16	9	11	36
92'	2	7	10	5	24	24	12	15	41

(a.) Regional identity; (b) Immigration/ 'meridionalisation' of Italy; (c) Discrimination of a region in nation-state; (d.) Regional politics; (e) Political corruption; (f) Economic problems; (g) Inefficiency of public services.

**Table 4:** Indices of frames of political conflict and social intolerance in the Lega's publication during different electoral campaigns<sup>7</sup>

Electoral Campaign	Index Conflict	Index Intolerance
General 1983	0.50	0.04
European 1984	0.45	0.35
Administr. 1985	0.64	0.50
General 1987	0.46	0.18
Administr. 1988	0.69	0.62
Administr. 1989	0.55	0.49
European 1989	0.61	0.38
Administr. 1990	0.49	0.26
Communal 1991	0.77	0.55
Referendum 1991	0.78	0.19
General 1992	0.57	0.06
Communal 1992	0.69	0.00
Total	0.60	0.29

Source: Costantini (1994:165)

<sup>7</sup> Costantini came to the index for both categories by simply dividing the amount of those articles with particular frame by the total amount of articles coded.

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- Alto Adige

b. Weeklies:

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