

'Subaltern victims' or 'useful resources'?

Migrant women in the *Lega Nord* ideology and politics

Sara R. Farris

Francesca Scrinzi

Since the mid-2000s we have witnessed the emergence of a new phenomenon in several European countries: the mobilisation of issues of women's rights and gender equality by populist radical right parties (PRR)¹ in anti-immigration campaigns. For instance, the National Front (*Front National*) in France, the Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*) in the Netherlands and the Northern League (*Lega Nord*, hereafter LN) in Italy have all begun to adopt pseudo-feminist arguments to stigmatise migrant – especially Muslim – communities for their alleged intrinsic misogyny and patriarchy. These developments appear as a strategy of 'agenda-grabbing' by the PRR (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007, 213) seeking to normalise their public image and legitimate their anti-immigration arguments. In the PRR propaganda, the issue of women's rights is appropriated to re-frame the anti-immigration agenda. PRR parties treat gender equality as a standard against which a superior national self can be measured in comparison with inferior foreign others (Towns, Karlsson and Eyre 2014). Within this discourse gender equality is considered a trait, which is specific to the culture of European nations as opposed to the culture of non-European racialised Others. PRR parties' pseudo-feminist arguments are in sharp contradiction with their anti-feminist politics and policies. While advocating

women's emancipation as the capital value of the European (Christian) social fabric, which migrants allegedly lack, these parties also promote policies that encourage the maintenance of traditional roles for women. Thus a tension lies at the heart of current gendered developments in the PRR ideology and politics, between the traditional gender models promoted by nationalist movements where women are cast as biological and social reproducers of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997) and this pseudo-feminist discourse. Recent contributions have illustrated some aspects and contradictions of these phenomena, for instance in relation to the PRR parties' embrace not only of women's but also gay rights (Bracke 2011). Others have described the double standard applied to migrant men and women in the context of raising hostility towards the Muslim population, not only by PRR parties, but within the mainstream more generally; whereas Muslim men have been mostly described as representing a social and cultural danger to European societies as well as being inherently misogynist, Muslim women have been portrayed prevalently as victims to be rescued (Abu-Lughod 2013). Little however has been written on the gendered ideology and strategies of these parties, particularly when it comes to addressing the issue of migrant women. If the gendered narratives used by the PRR create gender-specific roles for men (breadwinners and defenders of the nation) and women (caring mothers), what are the gender-specific roles assigned to migrant men and to migrant women?

Further, little is known about how gender impacts on activism in these parties (Blee and Linden 2012; Mulinari and Neergard 2013; Scrinzi 2014a, Scrinzi 2014c, Scrinzi 2017). Yet, women are actively engaged in conservative and right-wing organisations across the world and may feel empowered 'as women' by their activism (Bacchetta and Power 2002). Finally, in spite of its

importance in the context of the development of PPR politics across Europe, little has been written on these issues in the case of the LN in Italy.²

This chapter aims to address these gaps in the scholarly literature by focusing on the gendered dimensions of anti-immigration ideology, policy and politics in the case of the LN. In particular, we draw on the empirical findings of two research projects to analyse the instrumental mobilisation of women's rights by the LN to stigmatise migrant, particularly Muslim, communities.³ By combining ethnographic and documentary data, we shed light on what we call the 'sexualisation of racism' (Farris 2017) and the 'racialisation of sexism' (Scrinzi 2014a; Scrinzi 2014b) in the LN discourse. These concepts refer to the application of a sexualised double-standard to migrant men and women as the former are treated as 'oppressors' and the latter as 'victims'. The former means that different racist registers are applied to construct migrant men and women. The latter refers to the processes through which sexism is treated as a problem affecting only migrant communities within allegedly liberated European societies.

The chapter is organized as follows. Firstly, by drawing upon discourse analysis of the party's programme, propaganda materials and political speeches, we reconstruct both the ways in which the LN has publicly presented the issue of gender equality amongst migrants and the party's depictions of migrant women – Muslim and non-Muslim alike.⁵ Secondly, based on official party documents and existing studies, we analyse the LN agenda on gender and the family as well as its seemingly 'contradictory' policy with regard to female migrants. Thirdly, through the analysis of interviews, we illustrate how LN activists negotiate the party's treatment of migrant care-givers.⁶

In the conclusion, we argue that the mobilisation of women's rights by the LN is not simply the paternalistic facet of anti-immigration politics, nor a mere electoral strategy – as it has been commonly held to be in most literature on the sudden 'treacherous sympathy' of right-wing parties for migrant women, to borrow Ahmed's (2011) definition. Rather, it is also linked to the familialistic culture and traditional arrangements of the gendered division of work dominant in Italy that the party supports, and in which migrant women, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, play a key role as providers of paid care.

Migrant women as subaltern victims

Upon its foundation in 1991 the LN presented itself as the party of a new era in Italian politics, denouncing the corrupt political élite and the theft of the Northern Regions' resources and autonomy by the central government. In the 1990s, the LN was still bound to an ethno-regionalist ideology demanding the independence of Padania (roughly corresponding to the Italian regions north of the Po river) based on the idea of it being a homogenous nation with a common history and ethnic identity. The LN's regional nationalism at this time led to an identification of southern Italians as the racialised Other. At the end of the 1990s and in the 2000s, particularly after its participation in the Berlusconi government and therefore its co-optation into national politics, the LN moved from demanding secession to fiscal federalism, and the Other was increasingly identified in non-Italian, non-western migrants. From its entrance into the government in 2001 onwards, the LN has distinguished itself with its harsh anti-immigration and increasingly anti-Islam propaganda. Migrants in general are

depicted as a threat to national security, and Muslims in particular are indicted as a danger to the Christian roots of Italian culture, but also on account of their allegedly violent treatment of women.

The mobilization of the issue of gender equality by the LN in anti-immigration campaigns begins – at least in a discernible way – with its campaign against Turkey’s entry into the EU in 2005. In line with the vitriolic style of the party, the LN encapsulated its opposition in a poster, which remained on the walls of the peninsula for many months. The poster portrays three women. On the left is a veiled woman behind prison bars: she is surrounded by darkness but her state of suffering is clearly discernible; on the right-hand side are two women with short hair and western clothes sitting at an office desk and seemingly discussing work issues in an illuminated environment. The caption on the left states “them...”, while that on the right states “us...”. Beneath the image is an almost rhetorical question: “Are you willing to take the risk? No to Turkey in Europe”. The message is very clear: admitting Turkey to the European Union would allow the entrance of a country with an Islamic majoritarian culture into a traditionally Christian area and therefore run the risk of exposing European women to a religion which subjugates the female sex.



Picture n.1: ‘Are you ready to take the risk? No to Turkey in Europe’.

From 2006 onwards in particular, the LN has continued to use gender equality against Islam in obvious instrumental ways. In February 2006 the city councilor for the LN in Milan, Matteo Salvini (now the president of the party) proposed a “Decalogue of freedoms” to be presented to immigrants applying for Italian citizenship. Five out of ten questions focus on women’s issues and are motivated by the idea that migrants – particularly Muslims – do not respect women’s rights. One can read:

‘Would you forbid your wife or daughter to dress like Italian women? What do you think of the statement according to which a woman must obey her husband, and that he can beat her in the case she does not obey him? Do you think it is acceptable that a man locks his wife or daughter at home to avoid that she dishonors the family in public? What would you do if your daughter or son wanted

to marry a person from another religion? Would you allow a male doctor to visit you (if you are a woman) or a female doctor to visit you (if you are a man)?'

In October 2009 the LN presented a law proposal for banning the burqa and niqab in public spaces. The proposal aimed to modify a previous law from 1975 allowing some categories of people to keep their faces covered if there was a 'justified motive'. It was officially motivated by security reasons, but was largely presented in the media as seeking to enable Muslim women who were victims of violence and obliged to use the integral veil to free themselves from the imposition.⁷ This recalls what happened in France, where the 2010 law banning full veils in public spaces was officially presented as a measure seeking to enhance public security, but was conveyed in the media as a women-friendly law (Tissot 2011). In 2013, the vice-president of the LN group in the Chamber of Deputies, Gianluca Buonanno, addressed the Imam of Florence Elzir, who dismissed the LN's anti-Islam propaganda as "uncivilized", with the following words: "it is laughable even only the idea that he [the Imam] thinks he can teach us civilised manners. We do not treat women like beasts".⁸ The campaign against Muslim communities as 'uncivilised', and Muslim men as oppressors of women, thus represents the main way in which the issue of gender inequality and violence as the exclusive domain of the (Muslim) Other has dominated the LN's anti-Islam propaganda. The idea that the LN belongs to a nation and civilisation that protects women's rights, in contrast to Islam, is increasingly mobilized in different instances, at both national and local levels.

However, it is important to highlight that it is not only Muslim men who are singled out as women's main enemies; nor is it only Muslim women who are

foregrounded as victims. In the xenophobic campaign in which the issues of sexism and gender violence are strongly racialised, and where racism itself takes the form of a distinction between migrant men as ‘bad’ and migrant women as ‘victims’, the LN openly identifies all men from Eastern Europe and the Global South more generally as misogynists and especially as ‘rapists’, and all women from these regions as passive ‘victims’. For instance, in April 2013 Salvini promoted on Twitter a new website called ‘All the immigrants’ crimes’. The site exclusively hosts journal articles reporting cases of violence in which an immigrant is the perpetrator, with cases of rape emerging as the most common crime among non-Italian, non-Western citizens. Migrant men in general are thus identified by the LN as a social threat that puts the female sex in danger. The racist register employed by the LN in order to express concern for Italian as well as non-Italian women mainly takes the form of a warning of the risks faced by women if immigrants are allowed to continue entering the country. The closure of Italian borders and the call for a ‘law and order’ agenda against the ‘crimes’ of migrant males in particular are thus the corollary of the contemporary ‘sexualisation of racism’ and ‘racialisation of sexism’ deployed by the LN, with deportation and harsher penalties being increasingly proposed as a panacea for the failures of multiculturalism.

But what is the position of the LN on gender equality in general? And how does the party concretely address the contradiction between campaigning against immigration and considering migrant women as victims to be rescued?

Migrant women as ‘useful resources’

Despite the LN's embrace of women's rights, the party has been strongly associated with a masculinist rhetoric. The latter is not only played out at the level of political discourse, but is organic to its anti-feminist and conservative positions on gender.

Women are assigned the role of biologically reproducing and caring for the nation/domestic community, and demographic issues are raised as arguments against immigration, as migrant/racialised women are associated with high rates of pregnancies and depicted as a threat to the nation (Avanza 2009; Huysseune 2000; Scrinzi 2014b). The LN thus presents all features of 'nationalist' gender politics whereby women are considered mainly as the reproducers of the nation. Further, not just women but also elderly people are presented as those who should transmit the Padanian cultural heritage to the younger generations, especially within the context of the family. The party proposes an idealised view of how elderly care should be arranged in society, stating that elderly people should be cared for at home⁹. It celebrates the role of the family, and within it of women, in the provision of unpaid care work for the elderly. At the same time, however, the LN, unlike other populist radical right parties, does not claim that women should be confined to the domestic roles: instead, it is acknowledged that women have to work. The LN thus exhibits an ambivalent position on the issue of women's work. While maternity is celebrated as the 'natural' role of women, and it is assumed that women should be the main unpaid carers for the elderly in the family, the LN does not fully condemn their desire to be professionally active. Women's paid work is explicitly supported as long as this does not jeopardise their domestic responsibilities. This is linked to the traditional predominance of owners of family-run businesses among the LN constituency:

women are celebrated as ‘honorary men’ partaking of the ‘masculine’ qualities of hard-working members of the nation, and contributing to the economic well-being of Padania (Huysseune 2000). The LN has promoted some measures to support work/family balance, such as the creation of nurseries in the workplace. The trade union linked to the LN claims part-time work arrangements for women to enable them to combine their domestic responsibilities with their jobs (Avanza 2009).

The centrality of the family to the LN’s ideology, the conception of elderly care as a women’s duty, but also the pragmatic recognition of women’s need to work have contributed to give rise to a peculiar contradiction within the LN’s anti-immigration agenda.

The growing demand for social care in Italian families in the last twenty years in particular is the reason for the mounting numbers of migrant women employed by families as housekeepers and especially care-givers. The demand for migrant care labour is located in the context of the ageing of the Italian population, the resilient unequal division of care work and the paucity of publicly-funded care services in Italy, where the ‘familialistic’ welfare state model rests on the role attributed to the family and to women in the delivery of unpaid and unrecognized personal care services. This situation has not only received wide media attention, but has also prompted sociologists, migration scholars and feminists to speak of a fundamental transition occurring in Italian society from a “family model of care” to a “*migrant in the family* model of care” (Bettio, Simonazzi and Villa 2006). In 2010 the National Institute for Social Insurance (INPS) counted 871,834 contracts for care-givers and domestic workers whereas estimates speak of more than one million workers being

employed in this sector, often informally, a large number of whom are migrant women (Pasquinelli 2012). Thanks to generous cash-for-care allowances and due to the paucity of long-term care services, the practice of recruiting migrant care workers extends beyond the middle class to lower-middle-class and working-class families (Gallo and Scrinzi 2015).

In this context, , on the one hand, migrant women, especially Muslims, are portrayed as the ‘victims’ of non-western male gender violence and thus are both offered rescue opportunities and required to rebel against their backward cultural surroundings. On the other hand, migrant women in general are identified not only as potential victims of foreign masculine violence but also as ‘useful resources’ in a context in which the demand for care and domestic work is on the rise. Whereas the identification of migrant women as victims of gender violence and patriarchy leads the LN to endorse law proposals demanding both stricter penalties and deportation for migrants and the assimilation of Muslim women to western models of womanhood, the identification of migrant women as carers has led the LN to advocate a number of measures that are perceived as being in contradiction with its strong anti-immigration agenda.

In Italy, working permit quotas for care-givers have been regularly established since 2005 and special regularization schemes were issued for care workers in 2002 and 2009. Furthermore, since January 2012 citizens from Romania and Bulgaria have not needed a permit to work in Italy, thereby allowing a significant pool of care-givers already present in the country to establish themselves more easily in this niche of the labour market. In Italy immigration policies for care and domestic workers have been very expansive, mostly in the attempt to cope with the massive presence of migrants informally

employed in private households, but also in order to meet the growing demand for these workers by Italian families. In 2002 a new immigration law, the so-called Bossi-Fini Act, taking its name from the then-leaders of the harshest anti-immigration parties in the Berlusconi government, the LN and National Alliance (*Alleanza Nazionale*), respectively, was soon followed by a regularization of care/domestic workers. Between 2001 and 2002, under the pressure of demonstrations across the country with elderly people and their care-givers taking to the streets of Italian major cities, Roberto Maroni (LN), declared the support of his party for the regularization of “all these extra-communitarians, the majority of whom are women, who carry out activities of high social importance for families” (cited in van Hooren 2011, 67). In 2005, again under Berlusconi’s government, specific immigration quotas for domestic and care workers were issued for the first time, allowing 15,000 domestic and care workers to enter the country – the same number established for other occupations altogether. In 2006 the same government “allowed the entrance of another 45,000 domestic and care workers, which was even more than the total (33,500) set for other occupations” (van Hooren 2011, 68). The tougher anti-immigration agenda of the new Berlusconi government in 2008 resulted in a moratorium on quotas for immigration. This was presented as a response to the global economic crisis that had seemingly made the recourse to migrant workers unnecessary. Tellingly, the only exception was made for domestic and care workers, for which instead the record quota of 105,400 was established. On this occasion, Roberto Maroni (then Minister of the Interior) again declared: “There cannot be an amnesty for those who entered the country illegally, for those who rape women or rob a villa; but we will certainly take into account all those situations that have a strong social

impact, as in the case of female migrant care-givers.”¹⁰ In 2009 the government granted an amnesty only for illegal migrants working as care-givers and domestic workers since that was considered the only sector where the national supply could not meet the demand for labour.

Despite campaigning against immigrants’ entrance into the country, the LN has thus not only closed an eye towards the general practice of hiring ‘illegal’ migrant women as carers and domestic workers in private households, but has even implemented concrete policies for their regularisation and recruitment. In so doing the LN has pragmatically accommodated the current Italian crisis of social reproduction (Caffentzis 2002).

The ‘good migrants’: LN activists employing migrant care-givers

The pragmatism of the LN’s politics vis-à-vis migrant care workers is reflected by the activists’ practices. Most informants – men and women alike belonging to both the middle and working classes - tended to agree, at least in principle, with the prescriptive view of family-based elderly care. Some older female activists however blamed the younger generations of Italian women who delegate elderly care tasks wholly to migrant care workers, who are foreigners to both the ethnic and domestic community: they themselves had not done this to their own parents. Nonetheless many female informants, while they said that ideally elderly people should be cared for at home, saw this as an unrealistic option, due to the lack of State-funded home-based care services and to the competing demands faced by women arising from their jobs, other domestic responsibilities as well as their political engagements. Most informants tended

also to take for granted the regularisations of care-givers as a ‘lesser evil’, emphasising that the latter are hard-working migrants whose contribution is needed by Italian society. While they said that immigration policies should be selective and that illegal migrant workers constitute a threat because they steal jobs and lower the pay of the Italian workers, activists also stated that they would allow for care-givers to be ‘imported’ because there is a real need for them. The interviews below are representative of this pragmatism:

‘If these care workers were already here with a job and a place to live, anyway they are already established, they might as well be regularised, so that they pay taxes on their work and fully respect the Italian law’ (middle-class male activist, 30 years old).

‘If someone is legal and respects our laws and is here to work then we are not against them, but they must be aware that they are in a country which has rules’ (middle-class female activist, 66 years old).

Several activists declared that they hired migrant care-givers themselves. Some of them displayed a rather disinhibited attitude, stating that they hired illegal workers; however, quite a few among them had subsequently regularised the workers’ juridical position. Some of these employers seemed quite happy with this arrangement, and told ordinary stories of acquaintance and collaboration between the family members and the employee. They considered the migrant care-givers to be a necessity in Italian society.

‘I think that we need the migrant care-givers because we [Italians] have become

spoiled, it is not easy to work full-time with someone who has Alzheimer's disease and we would not do this job any longer (...). The birth rate decreases, the people get old and we have this problem (...) The residential care homes for the elderly are expensive so I think the migrant care-givers are a resource' (working-class male activist, 36 years old).

'We have had some problems with my grand-father who was ill with Alzheimer's disease so we hired a male care-giver, an Indian boy whose juridical position we regularised. My aunt took care of my grand-father together with this boy (...). We did not want to hire him illegally because if a migrant works here, he or she must have both the rights and the duties of an Italian citizen. We need migrants who are willing to take on these jobs which the Italians no longer want to do but if they come here to work then they have to be legal, lead a regular life, health services, pay taxes, not living here as illegal migrants. We can't accept everybody here' (middle-class female activist, 40 years old).

Other activists described their experiences with migrant care-givers as negative. According to them, these workers tended to take advantage of the generosity of their employers, and were either lazy or thieves.

'These people lived in houses which do not even have a tiled floor, they have soil in their houses. (...) Then they come here and find that we have floors to be polished, furniture to be cleaned, windows to be cleaned. They get lost and little by little they learn thanks to us, at our expenses, because when they are not able to do the work they are a calamity' (middle-class female activist, 80 years old).

These narratives do not greatly differ from those which have been observed in the case of employers of migrant domestic and care workers who are not anti-

immigration activists: it has been shown (Anderson 2000) that middle-class female employers tend to describe domestic service as an opportunity for integration into Italian society and for the moral improvement of migrant care and domestic workers, as these are described as women who come from pre-modern cultures. In these narratives, the work relationship and class hierarchy between the employers and their employees are obscured while alleged cultural differences are put to the fore.

Thus on the one hand, in spite of the official party positions on care as something that should be carried out by (female) family members, the presence of migrant care-givers was overtly tolerated, if not appreciated, by LN activists, who, in many cases, acted as their employers. This were especially true in the case of women, who were assigned the task of supervising migrant care workers. On the other hand, these workers were seen with suspicion. All the informants distinguished between 'good' and 'bad' migrants while talking about the care-givers: between those migrants who are tolerated as long as they 'integrate' themselves being inserted into labour market niches such as care work in the private sphere, and those who are perceived as deviant and behaving aggressively in the public space; between those migrants whose integration is deemed possible and those who are constructed as belonging to radically different cultures, such as Muslims. Migrant care-givers fall into the first category but are always at risk of shifting into the second one.

Conclusion

The analysis has shown a contradictory picture. First, migrant women,

particularly in the case of Muslims, are portrayed as ‘victims’ of male violence, whereby gender violence is treated as something inherent to their culture. At the same time, qua victims, these women are also subtracted from the category of the ‘dangerous’ migrant, which the LN applies to most foreigners. The LN thus fully participates in what we have called the ‘sexualisation of racism’ and the ‘racialisation of sexism’. Migrant women are ambiguously indicted as different from Italian standards of womanhood, but also given a chance to meet such standards. As care-givers who help Italian families to cope with the demands of everyday life, migrant women are pragmatically portrayed as a ‘lesser evil’.

Secondly, though the LN advocates a traditional role for women in society as mothers, wives and care-providers, which is – in principle – shared by most female activists, its ‘ambivalent familialism’ recognizes that migrant care and domestic workers are needed to support women’s paid work. Thus the party acknowledges the need for women to have a ‘gender’-acceptable replacement for them at home. That is, the LN does not oppose the employment of migrant women in private households because they are ‘women’. Similarly, LN activists are willing to accept the ‘exception’ constituted by the regularization of migrant women who work as care-givers to an otherwise aggressive and overt anti-immigration rhetoric.

To interpret the attitude of anti-immigration parties like the LN in constructing migrant women as both victims and ‘useful resources’, thereby excluding them (albeit not without ambiguities) from the category of undesirable migrants (in which migrant men tend to be confined), we propose the following framework.

To begin with, by singling out Muslim migrant women in particular as

fragile subjects in need of rescue, the LN participates in a trope which is common to nationalist politics: namely, the identification of women as lacking agency and as cultural and social reproducers of the nation. Accordingly, migrant women can be presented with offers of salvation and invited to adopt Western lifestyles: it is assumed they can be moulded to absorb the culture of the 'host' nation and thus become its cultural reproducers. Further, while conservative gender positions are attributed to the racialised Other, the unequal relations of gender which are dominant in the immigration society are reproduced through outsourcing care work to the racialised Other. Through the rhetoric of the 'sexualisation of racism' and the 'racialisation of sexism', different figures of femininity are thus constructed: Italian/Padanian women, whose emancipation is predicated, among other things, upon their participation in paid work; stigmatised Muslim subaltern women; and migrant (often Christian) docile and idealised care-givers. The migrant care-giver embodies the sexist stereotypes and feminine caring figure on which LN ideology is centrally based.

This notwithstanding, we should note that by admitting an exception for the regularisation of those migrant women who work as domestic workers and care-givers the LN adopts a contradictory attitude in terms of its immigration politics, but a coherent attitude in terms of its gender and class politics. In other words, the LN's pragmatic participation in the regularisation of migrant women care-givers is coherent with its gender politics because it is in line with the party's familialism: namely, it is in line with the party's focus on the defence of the family and the promotion of the family as the main site where care is provided. At the same time, we have shown that the LN tolerates women's work outside the family. This element adds to the continuity between the LN's policies on migrant

care-givers and its gender politics and ideology: as migrant women help Italian women to combine their paid work with their domestic responsibilities, the party can tolerate their presence. In so doing, the LN widely shares the familialistic culture of the country.

The LN position is also coherent with its class politics: its electorate mostly belongs to the lower-middle classes and middle classes in Northern Italy. These families are likely to hire a migrant care worker and therefore to benefit from liberal policies towards these migrants. Female activists reproduce their middle-class femininity through hiring migrant care workers and delegating the ‘dirty work’ to them. Through domestic service, LN female activists can thus combine their domestic responsibilities with their jobs as well as with their political engagement; they reproduce their femininity as ‘modern’ Italian women, as opposed to the stigmatising representation of Muslim and migrant women constructed as victims.

Notes

¹ Cas Mudde (2007) defines the PRR on the basis of its nativist, populist and authoritarian ideology (Mudde 2007). There is no consensus among scholars on the definition of this party family and several other categories are used such as far right, extreme right and nationalist right (Farris 2017). Excluding our own research (Farris 2012; Farris 2017; Scrinzi 2014a, Scrinzi 2014b; Scrinzi 2017) so far only two other authors have addressed these issues in the case of the LN (Avanza 2008; Huysseune 2000).

³ Francesca Scrinzi, 'Gendering activism in populist radical right parties. A comparative study of women's and men's participation in the Northern League (Italy) and the National Front (France), funded by the European Research Council (2012-2014); and Sara R. Farris, 'The Political Economy of Femonationalism. On the instrumentalisation of gender equality in anti-immigration campaigns in France, Italy and the Netherlands', funded by the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (2012-2013).

⁵ This section of the chapter draws mainly on an analysis of the official LN positions that were found on the LN's official website between 2009 and 2013. The analysis was conducted by means of 'critical discourse analysis' methodology - CDA (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Documents analysed also included political posters, relevant parliamentary discussions and interviews with party leaders that appeared in national newspapers. The concept of 'discourse' within CDA refers to a "social practice" that produces meanings by linking the linguistic and the societal level (institutions and social structures) (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258). In particular, critical discourse analysis is interested in identifying the linkages between (political) discourse and the ways in which such discourse produces and reproduces power hierarchies, ideologies and forms of domination.

⁶ This section of the chapter draws on biographical interviews with twelve male and twelve female LN activists based in Lombardy: most of these belonged to the middle classes, reflecting the class composition of the LN electorate. Traditionally, LN voters are business-owners and artisans, but there has been a recent increase in working-class manual workers among them (Passarelli and Tuorto 2012). The biographical approach is often used in ethnographic studies of

rightist activism to overcome attitudes of suspicion vis-à-vis the researcher: in life histories, which focus on the respondent's own individual trajectory rather than on issues of belief or political commitment, informants will be less likely to present their organisation's ideology as personal sentiment (Blee 1996).

⁷ http://www.leganord.org/index.php/notizie2/7743-Pdl_leghista_per_rendere_illegale_il_velo_islamico_integrale

⁸ <http://www.leganord.org/index.php/notizie2/11015-chaouki-buonanno-a-elzir-nessuna-lezione-da-islam-noi-non-trattiamo-le-donne-come-bestie>

⁹ <http://www.leganord.org/i-documenti/161-welfare-e-salute.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.repubblica.it/2008/05/sezioni/cronaca/sicurezza-politica4/bossi-spagna/bossi-spagna.html>

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