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HYBRID HEGEMONY:
RETHINKING GRAMSCI IN THE CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN CONTEXT

MA thesis

30 EAPs

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Tartu 2018

I have written the Master Thesis myself, independently. All of the other authors' texts, main viewpoints and all data from other resources have been referred to.

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1. Introduction

At present, any disaffected individual who feels any sort of sympathy toward a counter-hegemonic position can easily connect with other like-minded people and be radicalized through the channels of the internet and of social media. Technological advancements in communication technology have expanded more rapidly than the means to control them, and as a result, all sorts of political communications have abounded in the anarchic realm of digital media. This paradigm has led to a plurality of political narratives of every kind – some coexisting, some clashing – but nonetheless all without a defined center.

Even so, in many ways, the conditions in contemporary Europe parallel the societal ills of the 1920s and 1930s that the Marxist political philosopher Antonio Gramsci originally tried to diagnose from his prison cell in Turi. Around the globe, men and women have turned to political extremes, coming from sentiments of economic discontent and social alienation. Violence has spilled over onto the streets, actualized out of hostile political rhetoric. Nonetheless, in the past, such a type of social dissatisfaction remained localized in certain smaller groups and would be more or less contained and controlled or coopted by the state due to the limiting technological factors of communication. From these past circumstances – while the social sentiments and dissatisfactions remain the same – the contemporary state of affairs has completely inverted in terms of its relative localization. While the present societal conditions could be characterized by some as a sort of return to the past – an idealized and naturalized *status quo* – the onward-marching technological progression that has led to an uncensored digital media sphere has rendered such a return impossible.

According to Gramsci's understanding of cultural hegemony, this widespread contemporary societal contestation and discontent – especially from the side of the far right – should not have actualized in such a fashion. As Gramsci saw the situation, the power-holding forces of society, through their duumvirate control of political society through force and civil society through cultural hegemony, should have castrated any opposition that could offer any sort of existential challenge. However, this is not the case, and this current constellation implies three equally paradigm-shifting realities in the place of accepted theory: 1) now, European societies are in the midst of a hegemonic shift away from neoliberalism; 2) the actualization of hegemony is impossible in itself due to such drastic changes in technology; 3) or, hegemony itself has never been possible, and in its

place exists a spectrum of support between central power and multiple resistances to it, and only now can this process be discerned through technology itself.

Any non-liberal political view, including far left and far right, are counter hegemonic by their definition in relation to the culturally hegemonic neoliberal center. However, in current scholarship and in Gramsci's original understanding of the concept, counter hegemony continually applies only to movements from the left and how they could navigate through Machiavellian "wars of position" in order to displace the hegemonic elites, finally culminating in a revolutionary "war of maneuver" to overthrow the state or state-system of values, replacing it with their own. This one-sided, almost dichotomous understanding of hegemony as a concept cripples its critical application by ignoring any theoretical complexities or logical outcomes. Any hegemonic force can sympathize with any ideological position and exercise its power and influence over civil society regardless of this political or ideological affiliation, and so, the same holds true for a counter hegemony.

With such a concrete background, this thesis will therefore focus on the dual character of media in an age in which counter hegemony has been problematized through the proliferation of digital media. As such, this paradigm presents a guiding research question: how does online media affect the ability of counter hegemony challenge to hegemonic control?

The leading hypothesis to the research question can be stated simply: online media provides counter hegemonies with a platform to challenge directly the construction of cultural hegemonic narratives, resulting in consent contestation rather than consent production. An inverse hypothesis of this would be that counter hegemonies do not challenge the construction of cultural hegemonic narratives in the sphere of online media. However, this thesis operates under the paradigm of the first hypothesis, especially considering the growing influence of "alternative media" in online spheres in the past several years. The capabilities endowed by alternative online media have allowed counter hegemonic groups to operate outside of the direct influence and censorship of hegemonic forces. This would mean that the idea of cultural hegemony and counter hegemony exists in flux rather than a binary, allowing for a spectrum of thought rather than those of the cultural hegemony and those in opposition.

It is crucially important to state from the beginning of this thesis that it does not act to support, nor purport to represent nor to deny a Gramscian or Neo-Gramscian understanding of political reality. Instead, this research aims to discern what aspects of cultural hegemony and of Gramscian-understood cultural hegemony can still be applied in a completely distinct yet genetically related historical context: that of contemporary Italy, from which this research question is drawn and on which this hypothesis shall be tested.

Italy, after all, was the country from which Gramsci drew his theoretical inspiration for cultural hegemony in the first place, taking his theory from the cultural, social, and historical experiences of the country. In addition, in Italy, the far right has surged in recent years – against the theoretical predictions of Gramsci – and major parties of the far right – namely *Lega Nord (LN)* and *Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)* – have played a crucial role in a hypothetical centre right electoral coalition, with *LN* coming out on top of the coalition with over 17 percent of the overall vote in the 4 March 2018 national elections. The extreme far right in the form of *CasaPound Italia (CPI)* has taken local offices and, although it did not gain any seats in parliament, it still received a little under one percent of the overall vote in the national elections as well. With these contradictions to Gramscian predictions rampant within the Italian political and social landscape, Italy stands out as the prime candidate for preliminary study in order to discern exactly what processes have shifted and how cultural hegemony can be reimagined.

One thing is clear from this current paradigm, however; the dichotomy and duality of the structure of cultural hegemony has become entirely more complex, complex to a point that cultural hegemony as a theory in its previous understanding can no longer explain the actual political and social realities of a world with online media. This thesis aims to go forward into the nebulous character of hegemony and provide an interpretation of this complexity in its present state.

2. Literature Review

Before the specifics of theory and methodology come into place, a wider understanding of the background and discussion of the theories used in this thesis need to be outlined in order to bring to light the disagreements, controversies, and consensuses in existing literature on the studies of cultural hegemony, the far right, and alternative media.

However, cultural hegemony will act as the primary guiding theory, with far right and media studies acting as supplements in understanding the wider theoretical constellation. With the provision of such a context, then and only then can a transdisciplinary theoretical construct be put into place and operationalized that will inform the mechanical analysis of this thesis.

2.1 Cultural Hegemony and Counter Hegemony

The main conceptual focus of this thesis is cultural hegemony, and the main source of an understanding of cultural hegemony comes from the seminal literature of Antonio Gramsci. The main question that Gramsci raised was how exactly societal elites manufacture societal consent, and his answer to this came through his broad theorization of cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971). As the main theory discussed in this thesis, the intricacies of the concept will be discussed in the Conceptual and Theoretical Background section of this thesis. Nonetheless, the concept of cultural hegemony has inspired other scholars to apply Gramsci's framework in their own historical analyses, who have been considered either Gramscians or Neo-Gramscians.

However, this conceptualization of cultural hegemony did not provide a specific enough definition. T. J. Jackson Lears forwards that "the concept of cultural hegemony can only be understood within a variety of historical and intellectual contexts" and that the closest thing that Gramsci provided to a definition was "social consent" (Lears 1985, 568). Nonetheless, Lears notes the foresight of Gramsci in articulating – but not defining – Foucauldian discursive practice and the validation of hegemony in public discourse (Lears 1985, 574). Through his analysis of Gramscian thought, Lears provides a critical view of cultural hegemony before its definitional evolution with the Neo-Gramscians and shows that the concept of cultural hegemony needs a deeper definition.

The Neo-Gramscian application of cultural hegemony came about first from Robert W. Cox, who pushed for a critical approach to international affairs concentrating on a redefinition of hegemony from the realist perspective and a refocusing on the historical origins of hegemony as such (Cox 1981). Cox expanded upon this thought by later placing it in a Gramscian context (Cox 1983). From this background, Stephen Gill extrapolated Cox's conceptual framework to further explain hegemonic neoliberalism in a contemporary outlook (Gill, Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International

Relations 1993). Ted Hopf also stresses the Neo-Gramscian approach to hegemony in an international context, which displays the staying power of this attitude (Hopf 2013).

However, Neo-Gramscianism does not exist as the sole extant reading of Gramscian thought. Esteve Morera restructures Gramscian theory in a contemporary democratic theoretical context. The brunt of this article stresses the distinction that consensus, in a Gramscian sense, is not the liberal democratic “willingness of an individual to accept certain views... but rather in the conditions for willingness be present” (Morera 1990, 24). This understanding of consensus in turn informs the rest of Morera’s interplay between Gramscianism and democratic theory, which views even human rights discourse as a reproduction of culturally hegemonic societal consent. For Morera, in democracies “little concern [is] shown for the ideological basis of existing information” as it is produced in the structure of the cultural hegemony; “elitism and ... the so-called truth does not matter at all... except to “converted intellectuals” (Morera 1990, 24-25).

Nonetheless, the gaps in contemporary Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian theory come in that they both more or less ignore counter hegemonies outside of one of a conscious working class, whether operating in democracies or in other forms of government. This outlook could be remedied by looking at the conflict between the cultural hegemony and counter hegemony as the Foucauldian paradigm of power and resistance, as Stephen Gill outlines, albeit in a still Marxist prototype (Gill 2008). Taken out of this model, however, all social movements at the societal periphery could be considered counter hegemonic in their own way.

With this background, Adam David Morton masterfully places Gramsci in a contemporary context, drawing both from Gramsci himself as well as Neo-Gramscians. Morton characterized the most important aspect of a Gramscian method as the scholar “thinking in a Gramscian way,” striking a balance between austere and absolute historicisms (Morton 2007, 18). Another striking point that Morton makes in his work is a warning against a transformation of the interpretation into a cause (Morton 2007, 67). In addition, Morton reaffirms the counter hegemonic struggle as being one against globally hegemonic neoliberalism, although that this struggle should not be discerned as something completely state-centric. Still, with his focus on Mexican leftist movements as the nexus of his contemporary case study, Morton unravels Gramsci much like others

have in this way, continuously in a Marxist/post-Marxist tradition – which is cemented in his concluding remarks.

Nonetheless, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe helped to bridge this gap – albeit still in a post-Marxist light – by deessentializing the reductionism to the role of class and historical determinism in a conceptualization of hegemony, mainly from the growing gulf between the *mass* and the *class* that arose during the early authoritarian turn of the Soviet Union (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). For Laclau and Mouffe, Gramsci helped to explain this divide by attaching leadership to “values” and “ideas” instead of just political leadership, with a class not taking State power, but through actually becoming the State (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 69). As such, the counter hegemonic potential not only lies in their economic positions but in their social relations as well (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 85).

This being said, these Gramsci scholars and others have largely contributed to this field in the terms of what exactly has changed and defined cultural hegemony as a concept and an evolving discourse. As all constituent parts of this discourse, these understandings of cultural hegemony will be also included in the theoretical understanding underpinning this research. At the same time, the inclusion of all non-central, non-hegemonic actors – rather than solely the political left – to this constellation will be one of the additions of this thesis to this wider discourse in order to study the blind spots of past scholarship.

2.2 The (Far) Right

Compared to the almost century-long evolution of Gramscian thought, far right studies have evolved more or less over the past two decades. Central to far right studies, the formative far right scholar Cas Mudde forwarded a definition of the far right as nativist, authoritarian, and populist (Mudde 2007). Mudde’s impetus for creating such a definition for the radical right came from the “terminological chaos” of the 1990s and early 2000s wherein a lack of clear definitions existed within the scholarship of the far right, which would fall into a trap of situational adaptation that would fit the scholastic or ideational biases of the author (Mudde 2007). This definitional problem was compounded by the fact that “no ideological feature is shared by all parties” of the far right and, as such, this party family would have to represent a Weberian ideal type (Mudde 2007). The main difference between the far right and the extreme right comes in the former’s willingness to operate within liberal democratic frameworks while the later will at times stray outside

of this structure. Mudde's definition seemingly has resolved this question and has subsequently guided scholarship, and a contending definition to the far right has not materialized as such.

The main foci of far right studies, aside from a guiding definition, would be the practices of far right parties, especially in terms of their usage of media. Mark Fielitz and Laura Lotte Laloire present the contemporary paradigm amongst far right actors in the European political landscape, highlighting the practices of parties from Italy and wider Europe (Fielitz and Laloire 2016). Fielitz and Laloire stress the heterogeneity and fluctuation of far right actors and go on to stress that such "extra-parliamentary manifestations of the far right ... have long-term influences on European societies" and future research, such as this thesis, should reflect such trends (Fielitz and Laloire 2016).

The literature about the practices of the far right tends to remain on a case-by-case basis nonetheless. Heiko Koch presents a picture of *CPI* that both outlines the history of the party as well as its inherent hybridity due to its origins as a street movement (Koch 2016). Caterina Froio delves into the shifting narrative construction of the 'other' by *CPI*, a process crucial to this research (Froio 2016). Such an analysis of the narrative process of the far right using *CPI* as a case study proves invaluable in this exploration of the narrative production of counter hegemonies, as it could explain for any intervening factors outside of the global counter hegemony-local counter hegemony relationship. Samuel Bouron presents the practices of the *Identitaire* movement mirror, which many of those of *CPI* and other grassroots right wing movements that operate primarily through social and cultural means (Bouron 2016). As the group is "very active on the internet" and has access to "owning their own media," the Identitarians had "the opportunity to issue propaganda" that would bypass the filter of hegemonic media outlets (Bouron 2016). Digital media as such has given a counter hegemon equal footing in the cultural arena. Similar literature on the far right provides a parallel background.

As per existing gaps in far right literature and theory, Cas Mudde expounds upon the weaknesses and murky areas of contemporary far right studies and the direction that this scholarship needs to take. For Mudde, hypotheses have replaced theoretical assertions in far right studies, which are now situated within a "fourth wave" of the far right, and many important issues remain understudied – namely gender, media, religion, and "socio-

cultural” factors (Mudde 2016). He reaffirms that such study should take place using qualitative means, steering clear from “problematic data sources” such as Eurobarometer and the World Values Survey (Mudde 2016). As such, this thesis will inform contemporary far right scholarship on this “fourth wave” through the issues of media and the factors of the sociocultural as well as contribute to a transdisciplinary view of the far right by looking at the phenomenon through a critical Gramscian lens.

2.3 A Reading of Media

This all being said, contemporary conceptual scholastic literature, specifically on the radical right within social media, remains unacceptably weak. Most of these studies focus too directly on the specific particularities of far right actors without providing a synthesis of a wider theory of the far right and digital and social media. As such, this part of the literature will offer the broadest possible conceptual framework for media itself within cultural hegemony.

The central question in the case of media would then be a structure of how media functions in a Gramscian framework. David L. Altheide outlines a holistic model of how media functions within the context of cultural hegemony, focusing mostly on hegemonic media (Altheide 1984). Although looking at the arrangements of cultural hegemony in media in an American context, he argues that due to the structure of media from an institutional and resource-based standpoint, the media as a whole works to reaffirm preexisting societal power relations and values, making it a crucial aspect of cultural hegemony.

In comparison with this explanation of media in the framework of cultural hegemony, Joshua Atkinson lays out a definition of alternative media, which is counter hegemonic in its values and goals (Atkinson 2017). For Atkinson, alternative media is alternative *per se* because it challenges existing power structures or questions the *status quo*. Alternative media also uses alternative methods in order to produce its narratives due limited resources and power relations, and it is nonetheless all the same dependent on the cultural hegemony (Atkinson 2017).

Nonetheless, in both of these theorizations of media, instead, “social activists” or “political actors” could stand in the place of the radical right as an actor in itself. William A. Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld on the onset present this social activist – media complex

paradigm – albeit in a pre-social media context. Gamson and Wolfsfeld present the relationship of the media and the social movement as a “transaction between two complicated systems of actors with complex internal relationships” with varying degrees of “dependence on the other,” and through this symbiosis, hegemonic media acts to frame movements and build narratives both about these movements and current events (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). The movements, as such, must demonstrate “value” and a “need” to the journalists who act as “gatekeepers” for publicity, and as such, these political actors and social movements depend more on the media than the inverse (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993).

Lastly, another important aspect of this work for this thesis is on the question of a methodological approach for the study of alternative media. Atkinson reaffirms a qualitative analysis for alternative media. This qualitative approach would be in place whether or not the researcher chooses to analyze the sources of media production (as this thesis will endeavor to do) or the audiences of alternative media itself. This qualitative analysis, paired with deductive category analysis, “reveals any themes or characteristics within the content and how the content should be understood within a larger context” (Atkinson 2017).

The existing gaps in media studies in regards to this thesis parallel those of cultural hegemony and far right studies. Far right media usage remains an understudied area of research, and media systems understood through a Gramscian paradigm of hegemony have reinforced this deficiency by not including far right actors as counter hegemonic. In addition, a blind spot in literature on media exists in discussing the liminality between a hegemonic actor and a counter hegemonic one. Fundamentally, this actor-centric hybridity and the possibility of such will be discussed throughout the course of this thesis.

3. Conceptual and Theoretical Background

From the literature review, the three main concepts and guiding theories of cultural hegemony, far right studies, and media analysis can provide a transdisciplinary framework to better inform the analysis of this thesis. Both theoretical strengths and weaknesses of each concept will be taken in account, with any gaps from the theoretical structure explained through the outcomes and findings of this thesis. As such, the exact conceptual pieces will be considered in this section in order to present what exactly will

deliberated in the formation of a methodological framework and then later in the theoretical understanding of the results of this research.

3.1 A Theory of Hegemony and Counter Hegemony

This being said, the theoretical and conceptual background of this thesis relies heavily on a predicated understanding of Antonio Gramsci's theorization of cultural hegemony based upon his writings in the *Quaderni del Carcere*. Gramsci's *Quaderni del Carcere* – representing the breadth of his entire political and societal thought collected during his imprisonment between 1929 and 1935 – forms the entirety of his conceptualizations on cultural hegemony and counter hegemony. The English language translation used within this thesis, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, provide Gramsci's work a holistic yet focused way, a difficult task considering that these prison notebooks consisted of thousands of pages of unorganized thought. The section that required the most reordering from the fragments on “Italian History and Politics” exist as the most edited, and those on “Notes on Politics” were the most intact; as such, this presents a lower chance that the editors biased the “Notes on Politics” with their own opinions (Hoare and Smith 1971, xii). This is most important as Gramsci's theorization on cultural hegemony – although built off his understanding of Italian history and politics – comes in “Notes on Politics.”

Nonetheless, Gramsci's own conceptual framework plays the most important role in the formation of his theory. Like any other scholar, Gramsci built upon the precepts and conceptualizations of other like-minded and contemporary scholars, and in this way, Italian philosopher and politician Benedetto Croce influenced many of Gramsci's prototypical theories. Most central to the ideation of cultural hegemony, Croce viewed society as a “perpetual conflict between the Church and State,” in which the “Church” represents the totality of civil society, a view itself inspired by Croce's understanding of civil society (Gramsci 1971, 245). Nonetheless, Gramsci posited that the “Church” in this case could become part of the “State” “in order to better preserve its monopoly on with the support of that zone of ‘civil society’ which the Church represents” (Gramsci 1971, 245). Instrumental to the “Church” in this situation would be “the school system, and other institutions and activities” – namely organized religion and media (Gramsci 1971,

246). As a totality, organized religion, the school system, and the media as a triumvirate form a cultural hegemony.

However, what exactly is the role of this cultural hegemony? Gramsci states that “every state tends to create and maintain a certain type of civilisation and of citizen... and to eliminate certain customs and attitudes and to disseminate others,” and the structure of cultural hegemony works to create the consent toward these values amongst the citizenry (Gramsci 1971, 246). Gramsci goes on, “the State must be conceived as an ‘educator,’ in as much as it tends precisely to create a new type or level of civilisation;” this education occurs primarily in the subjugated “Church,” the realm of cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971, 247). As such, the counter hegemony in the sphere of the cultural exists as all of those actors who oppose the values and “education” of the “State” in this way.

Fundamentally, this presents the hegemony as a superstructure. The cultural hegemony of the “Church” or the civil society of organized religion, state schooling, and media form a priming mechanism toward societal consent toward elite values and with institutional political society as an alternate push from above to institutionalize the hegemony within society and punish those who stray from accepting these values as their own. That group that refuses the values of the hegemony consequentially fashions the counter hegemony.

Gramsci, however, does not solely define the roles of the cultural hegemony in relation to the elites; he also directly outlines – both theoretically and philosophically – how actors in the form of the counter hegemony would act in such a paradigm, although his ideological leanings color this in a solely Marxist hue. Nonetheless, Gramsci envisions a type of modern “Prince,” a reconceptualization of Niccolo Machiavelli’s archetypical commander who “could also be a political leader whose aim is to conquer a State or to found a new type of State” (Gramsci 1971, 253). For Gramsci, the individuals both the individuals at the head of the left and the left as a whole represented this new “Prince.”¹ As compared to previous political projects, Gramsci saw this process as “neo-praxis” that translated into “immediate political actions” and not some sort of utopian project (Gramsci 1971, 248). This process happens mainly through a “war of position.”

¹ See pages 123-202 of Gramsci 1971 for his theorized practices and behaviors for such a “Modern Prince.”

For Gramsci, the “war of position” represents the hidden struggle for the cultural realm that goes on outside of direct view of society. In contrast to the open “war of manoeuvre” – or open conflict between classes, i.e., hegemonic and counter hegemonic groups, which only lasts temporarily, this “war of position” “once won, is definitively decisive” (Gramsci 1971, 239). While this cultural struggle does in fact take place, evident in conflicting value narratives, Gramsci does not provide any reason for his theoretical conclusion of a “definitively decisive” war. Instead, this proclamation acts as an affirmation of a progressive Marxian teleology even if Gramsci himself does reject some points of orthodox Marxist economic determinism. Following Gramsci’s logic separate of this determinism, this war and seismic shift would only displace the current cultural hegemony, starting the process anew with a new hegemony and new counter hegemonies. With this in mind, this thesis will utilize Laclau and Mouffe’s deessentialized class with the implied consequent widening of the counter hegemony to include those socially opposed to the cultural hegemony.

The crux of Gramsci’s Machiavellianism and “war of position” is that he applies it exclusively to Marxist actors. At the same time, this framework could equally be applied to other counter hegemonic actors, such as the radical and extreme right within Italy and Western Europe. The French *Nouvelle Droite* theorist Alain de Benoist has recognized and embraced such a view, as well as Eurasianist Alexandr Dugin in multiple publications, both coming from the realm of right wing political thought. In the same vein, the 2018 electoral campaign could be understood as a war of position of the counter hegemonic right against the center. As such, the praxis of the counter hegemony represent as a war of position in Gramscian terms without taking into account the political and ideological considerations – nonetheless still against the culturally hegemonic neoliberal global order identified by Cox, Gill, and Morton.

In the same way, the Gramscian understanding of a top-down approach of the cultural hegemonic superstructure provides a robust theoretical background for its time, but its initial foundation ignores one simple yet crucial aspect within the degrees of hegemony and counter hegemony: relativity. As such, this thesis will utilize Morton’s “thinking in a Gramscian way,” and this type of historicization – although taking contemporary circumstances into account – will instead inform the theoretical basis of this thesis.

In addition, many aspects of cultural hegemony and counter hegemony have drastically changed in the eight decades since Gramsci penned his works. While the importance of organized religion has subsided in the global West, the importance and influence of education and media has increased exponentially and inversely. Technological changes to media and anarchic nature of digital media, which remains outside the control of both the State and the cultural hegemony in thrall, were nonetheless transformations that Gramsci did not and could not necessarily predict. This transformation has led to a multiplicity of spaces of unregulated, uncensored discourse that has allowed for counter hegemony to organize outside of interference or suppression by the cultural hegemony.

3.2 A Definition of the Far Right

However, without a clearly concise definition of the far right, this alternative view of counter hegemony could be lazily adapted in order to fit any actor on the margins of society – Mudde’s stated problem of “situational adaptation.” Due to the political connotations of the far right due to the historical case of Italy, accusations of fascism or the rehabilitation of fascism are often used from the center and the left in the form of political rhetoric. In order to navigate such a murky and politically relative discursive space, this definition of the far right is not just useful for further research but absolutely necessary. Fortunately, Cas Mudde, again, provides such a definition.

From this paradigm, Mudde looked to circumvent a “minimum definition,” instead creating a maximum one based on “core concepts” (Mudde 2007, 14-15). The central concept that Mudde put forward for these parties was that of the nation, but this conceptualization of nation was further complicated by issues of civic and ethnic nationalism, which are not always exclusive to the far right (Mudde 2007, 16-17). From this problematic construct, Mudde forwards nativism as the conceptual answer, defined as “an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state.” (Mudde 2007, 19). In this way, the concept of nativism marries both civic and ethnic nationalism together.

However, nativism does not exist alone in the central conceptual framework of the radical right, which comes together with two other key concepts: authoritarianism and populism. Mudde defines authoritarianism here as a “belief in a strictly ordered society, in which

infringements of authority are to be punished severely” (Mudde 2007, 23). However, this does not mean that far right actors blindly accept state authority, and “they can and will rebel under certain circumstances” (Mudde 2007, 23). Populism, instead, acts as an ideological feature that pits the “pure people” against the “corrupt elite,” with the far right parties representing this “pure people” through their activities (Mudde 2007, 24). Strikingly, economic systems do not act as “a core feature of the party family’s ideology,” and radical right parties can support economic agendas ranging from libertarian markets to welfare chauvinism (Mudde 2007, 25).

From this trifecta of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, Mudde then goes into the problem of categorization of parties. While conservatives may popularly be considered as right wing, with their “tendencies toward “authoritarianism, traditionalism, religiosity, and nationalism,” they primarily seek to conserve a status quo, which is relative by country (Mudde 2007, 27). Nationalists and ethno-regionalists are sometimes included in the far right, but not always. Finally, populism does not exist solely on the right, as neoliberal populist and social populist parties exist as well (Mudde 2007, 29).

Delving further into this problem of categorization, Mudde poses the question of whether classification should come from a researcher-defined or party-defined ideology (Mudde 2007, 33). The names of parties do not act a good measurement due to the nebulousness of many of the words included, and self-identification of the parties seldom works due to the connotations of nativism, populism, and authoritarianism in popular discourse (Mudde 2007, 34-36). From this, Mudde puts forward that qualitative content analysis of official party literature acts as the best medium for categorizing the radical right (Mudde 2007, 38). For Mudde, “strict coding schemes leads to conceptual rigidity, particularly when applied over time,” and “qualitative content analysis is a far more effective approach to studying phenomena like the core features of a party ideology” (Mudde 2007, 38-39). Mudde’s “causal chain approach,” as well as his qualitative content analysis therefore will be operationalized in this thesis.

Lastly, and most importantly for the specificities of this thesis, Mudde categorizes several Italian political parties and movements as radical right. These parties are the *Alleanza Nazionale*, *Lega Nord*, and *Fiamma Tricolore* (Mudde 2007, 56). Since Mudde’s work, the *AN* has merged with *Fratelli d’Italia*, the *Lega Nord* continues onward as a strong

national radical right party, and *Fiamma Tricolore* has split into several factions, one of these being *CPI*. All of the modern far right parties therefore parallel Mudde's original classifications, and as such, this arrangement provides a basis for the inclusion of these parties within this thesis.

3.3 A Theory of Media within Hegemony

After this presentation of the concept of hegemony through Gramsci and the definition of the far right and the methodology through which to study it by Cas Mudde, there still remains one last – yet crucial – concept left to complete the tripartite theoretical fundament of this thesis – the media. To complete this structure and to tie together all constituent parts within the later methodological framework, an understanding of both hegemonic and counter hegemony media is necessary.

First in this paradigm are a presentation of hegemonic media and the functions of media in the first place. David L. Altheide provides a solid explanation of as to why media acts in the interests of the ruling class and toward the reproduction of cultural hegemony. He shows this in giving a three-pronged analysis of what exactly forms hegemonic media structures. Altheide's first point is that the socialization of journalists comes after the imposition of "guidelines, work routines, and orientations replete with the dominant ideology" (Altheide 1984, 478). In order to arrive at a point of their career during they would be able to report on current events – *i.e.*, provide narratives – journalists would have to have already at least tacitly accepted culturally hegemonic ideological precepts.

The second, and arguably most trenchant, point of Altheide's framework is that hegemonic media covers "topics and present news reports which are supportive of the *status quo*" (Altheide 1984, *Ibid.*). By supporting the societal and ideological *status quo*, media does not provide any critique of the dominating cultural hegemony and therefore is implicitly if not directly supporting it as well.

The last point of Altheide, due to the American background of his scholarship and object of research, provides a theoretical basis for this thesis only if taken with parallel definitions. Altheide views the media as presenting for the most part "pro-American and negative coverage of foreign countries" (Altheide 1984, 479). If "pro-American" can be taken as a proxy for pro-state then this statement could be applicable to any national case if broadened in such a fashion.

With such a broadening in mind of Altheide's last point taken together with his other two theoretical assertions, *RaiNews*, *Radiotelevisione italiana S.p.A.*, acts as the prime exactly of Italian state media representative of cultural hegemony. *RaiNews*, considering the election of the majority of its board by the Italian parliament (the other two are appointed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance). In addition, the funding and organization for *RaiNews* come directly through the Italian state, can therefore be taken as representative of Italian culturally hegemonic discourse.

However, in opposition to hegemonic media there needs to be a clear theoretical definition of counter hegemonic media. In this stead, a wider conceptualization of alternative media can be utilized as a proxy as within existing academic scholarship a theory of counter hegemonic media has not been developed. To this point, Joshua D. Atkinson has outlined both a definition of alternative media as well as an overarching methodology for its study. Atkinson defines certain media as alternative media "because of the use of language that challenged power, structures, called for sweeping social change, or called into question particular social roles" (Atkinson 2017, 176-177). While Atkinson primarily applied this definition to center of left actors, the radical right undoubtedly falls within the same category due to its drive for social change away from the current *status quo*.

One of the most critical aspects of alternative media exists in the "important role of production" and "unconventional practices to create content" (Atkinson 2017, 177). Due its less privileged situation in terms of resources and power relations, alternative media requires a synthesis of its production and content with its audience and feedback much more than mainstream media does (Atkinson 2017, 180).

However, with the study of alternative media there often exists a "fallacy of binary isolation" that implies that alternative media operates hermeneutically separately from mainstream media (Atkinson 2017, 179). In fact, the situation is the complete opposite, as alternative media sources "reported on issues and events that had already been covered in the mainstream media news" (Atkinson 2017, 191). Nevertheless, from this situation Atkinson presents a paradox: mainstream media is more community based in its narrative than alternative media even though alternative media relies on more dispersed methods (Atkinson 2017, 191). This situation, however, could be explained by Gramsci's assertion

that the cultural hegemony promotes universalizing values in order to not threaten the fundamentals of the societal power structure.

4. Methodological Framework

In mechanical terms, this thesis will conduct a single case study on the narrative construction of the far right in Italy in the framework of cultural hegemony, making a number of in-case observations on the far right parties, acting as agents of the counter hegemonic media and the Italian state media source of *RaiNews* for the cultural hegemony.

Specifically, Twitter accounts and linked official websites and news sites for *Lega Nord*, *CasaPound Italia*, and *Fratelli d'Italia* will represent the counter hegemonic locality for the case of Italy. Inversely, the account of *RaiNews* will denote the cultural hegemony as it finds its funding and organization within the Italian state. For the operationalization of this research, Twitter in this analysis can be conceived as a proxy for the wider network of social media, as the posts mirror the articles published both on actors' institutional sites and on other their other social media, including Facebook. An inclusion of these other sources, as such, would only result in a redundancy in analysis.

In technical terms, the Twitter accounts analyzed will be @RaiNews for *RaiNews*, @LegaSalvini, @MatteoSalviniMi, and @ilpopulista_it for *LN*, @GiorgiaMeloni and @fratelliditalia for *FdI*, @casapounditalia, @diStefanoTW, and @ilPrimatoN for *CPI*. This selection covers all institutional actors (state media from the side of *RaiNews*, official party accounts for *LN*, *FdI*, and *CPI*), the candidates for prime minister for each party, and the party-affiliated news sites in the case of *Il Populista* and *Il Primato Nazionale*.

Then, from these two sources, a Foucauldian discourse analysis will be utilized to display how each group constructs narratives of unexpected, politicized events, focusing on how these narratives are created and what exactly can be said in each circumstance. As for the other qualifiers of the “unexpected” and the “politicized,” “unexpected” in this instance would be defined as unforeseen, unanticipated, or incidental occurrences, and in turn, “politicized” would be defined as any social, legal, or economic issues from these events

that consequentially receive a political charge. As such, the unexpected nature of these events therefore would not allow any actors the opportunity to construct a preemptive narrative on the issue, which would in turn obfuscate the entire process of contestation and consent production, having been preplanned and predisposed already within a metanarrative. Twitter also acts as the most suitable digital media platform in this instance due to its inherent character of instantaneousness and the factor of character limits for each individual tweet.

From the moment that one of these unexpected event takes places, the coverage of the event would then be analyzed chronologically over a period of two weeks, which represents the typical information cycle from the breaking post on social media networks to publishing in a non-academic journal. In addition, these events will be taken from the same historical period of Italian contemporary politics, from December of 2016 to March of 2018 (the failure of the Renzi government's Constitutional Referendum to the 4 March national elections, marking one single government cycle). Elections and election results, as such, will not be included in these "unexpected" events as the actors can still pre-plan a narrative for any of the hypothetical results.

Below are listed these unexpected, politicized events in sequential and chronological order:

1. Milan Starbucks Protest – 17 February 2017 – 3 March 2017
2. Rimini Rape – 25 August 2017 – 8 September 2017 – 22 September 2017
3. FC Lazio Anne Frank Scandal – 23 October 2017 – 4 November 2017
4. German Imperial Flag Scandal – 7 December 2017 – 21 December 2017
5. Macerata – 3 February 2018 – 17 February 2018

In order to analyze the formation of narratives amongst each media source (Italian state media and the Italian far right media) will be collected and coded from their Twitter platforms and any linked media to these posts after the initial collection of data for every event. Each post from all sources would be coded first by relevance to the event in question and then in depth by its framing of the event in both positive or negative language and its support or opposition of preexisting elements. In order to minimize the subjectivity in the placement of narrative framing in the light of positivity or negativity, or support,

opposition, or counter narrative strategy, the exact reasoning for such an assignment in that vein will be explicitly stated in the analysis.

Finally, the two sources will be comparatively and chronologically analyzed by their presentation for each single event in order to discern any sorts of patterns in narrative construction and contestation. The discourse analysis of each would, in turn, discern how each of the constructed narratives either supported or opposed those of another subject, forming a grand narrative or counter narrative overall across all of the events, if every event is taken as its own text. If such a pattern can then be established through data collection and analysis, then this research can help to provide a more holistic understand of the current state of consent contestation in both local and global contexts.

The empirical framework of the research, as such, is to show exactly the processes that currently allow elite-level consent reproduction to be challenged through differing narrative construction, some in opposition, and others in concert. This overall setup will answer the research question in that they will directly display how the far right has operationalized online media as a platform for its own narratives in reaction to hegemonic state media, especially if a pattern of constant opposition is uncovered.

5. Analysis

The first event analysis begins in January 2017 while the last occurs in February 2018, only two weeks before the 4 March 2018 national elections. With this in mind, each actor will be evaluated in its presentation of each event and how each of these narratives and discourses evolves over the two week period of analysis. After the analysis of each event is completed, then an integrated analysis of the themes, patterns, confluences and divergences will be holistically presented.

5.1 Milan Starbucks Protest – 17 February 2017 – 3 March 2017

On 16 February 2017, Starbucks planted 42 palm trees in the main square of Milan, and protests and attacks against these installations began on 17 March 2017, when an activist set fire to one of the palms. Bananas, as well, would come to be planted alongside the palms. Resulting from this this event, several far right protests materialized there in response to this planting for a variety of reasons. From the internal hegemonic and counter hegemonic actors, *RaiNews*, Matteo Salvini and *LN*, and *CPI* would all put forward their

own narratives regarding the palms and bananas, expanding it far beyond the confines of the piazza.

RaiNews presented the Starbucks-related occurrences in Milan in a mostly positive light, although it mostly ignored any of the far right protests against the planting of the palm trees and the vandalism as well. The first tweet that *RaiNews* put forward about the project during this analysis period on 23 February only produced an informative message, stating simply that the planting of bananas would follow the already planted palm trees in the main square.² However, this simply informative narrative technique would shift in a matter of hours.

On the same day, the only mention that *RaiNews* published of opposition to the Starbucks palm-planting project came in the construction of the ridiculousness of such antagonism. This mention, posted on 23 February 2017, broadcasted the tweet of Roberto Maroni, President of Lombardy and member of *LN*, in response to the installation. The tweet stated “now [Italians] only now missing monkeys” with the attached hashtag of “#MyAfrica.”³ *RaiNews* described this tweet and the other protests against the palm trees as simply a “polemic,” tying such opposition to signify a verbal attack or act of aggression in this way.⁴

After commenting on the opposition to the project, instead, *RaiNews* mostly stressed the positive economic outcomes of both the installation in terms of jobs created and the need for the restyling project itself. In economic terms, *RaiNews* reported on 28 February 2017 that the restyling project on the main square would result in 350 jobs created, leaving out the fact that these jobs nonetheless would be short-term.⁵ This report paired with the announcement earlier that this “restyling” would continue into 2018, the same period

² RaiNews. (2017, 23 February). “Dopo le #palme piantati in Piazza Duomo a Milano alcuni banani, a completamento del progetto sponsorizzato da multinazionale del caffè.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/834762414138781696>.

³ RaiNews. (2017, 23 February). “Polemiche #Milano su Palme e Banani. @RobertoMaroni_: "Eh sì, adesso mancano solo le scimmie #LaMiaAfrica" → <http://goo.gl/Xq9lwQ>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/834849269920194560>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ RaiNews. (2017, 28 February). “Restyling per la piazza del Duomo a Milano, arriva #Starbucks. Ci sarà una torrefazione e 350 posti di lavoro → <http://goo.gl/FmQS27>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/836520801864155136>.

when Starbucks would launch its flagship store in Milan as well.⁶ As a totality, *RaiNews*' final points mark a construction of economic optimism for the future of Milan in regards to the whole project.

However, not all shared this same optimism, as pointed out in the first place by *RaiNews* in relation to Roberto Maroni. From the side of the far right, on his Twitter account, Salvini only expressed a sarcastic indignation toward the planting of bananas in addition to the original planting of palm trees. Salvini's response was that in response to this installation was that he had "no words" to describe his reaction.⁷ Other than this statement – at least on social media – Salvini and *LN* remained silent.

Il Populista, the *LN*-affiliated online newspaper that Salvini co-edits, presented two separate tweets relating to the event. The first, from 17 February 2017, relayed Salvini's own message of "camels and monkeys" that the piazza installation was "missing."⁸ In addition, the linked article from the previous day to this tweet continued in the same fashion, marking that "Africa" had come along with Starbucks – a fitting addition to the "clandestine" migrants who were already in the piazza.⁹ This discursive othering and framing the physicality of the palms and "clandestine" migrants as equivalent to "camels and monkeys" in an "African" totality – linked to Starbucks and the United States – implies a necessary characteristic of non-belonging. Lastly, the article itself appealed to a nebulous "many" people on Facebook and social media who had voiced opposition and discontent with the restyling.¹⁰ This hazy type of appeal toward the mass centers *Il Populista* with a general popular will, one that it has already predefined within this message.

⁶ RaiNews. (2017, 28 February). "Milano, restyling per piazza del Duomo: e nel 2018 arriva #starbucks → <http://goo.gl/pKwkrm>" [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/836496209896419328>.

⁷ MatteoSalviniMi. (2017, 23 February) "Dopo le #palme, stanotte in piazza Duomo sono stati piantati i #BANANI. Non ho parole." [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/834687599725916160>.

⁸ ilpopulista_it. (2017, 17 February). "Milano, palme e banani in Piazza Duomo. Salvini: "Mancano scimmie e cammelli..." [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/832487302991450113.

⁹ Il Populista. "Milano, palme e banani in Piazza Duomo. Salvini: "Mancano scimmie e cammelli..." 16 February 2017, Retrieved from <http://www.ilpopulista.it/news/16-Febbraio-2017/10832/milano-palme-e-banani-in-piazza-duomo-salvini-mancano-scimmie-e-cammelli.html>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

On 19 February 2017, *Il Populista* continued with this appeal to the masses, specifically a Milanese one in this case. The tweet framed the restyling as “how to piss off the Milanese,” and the article itself presented the Piazza Duomo – where the installation was placed – “in the collective unconscious of the Milanese, stands as a tall symbol of revolt against invaders.”¹¹ It goes onward to directly state that this square stands for “liberty” and that this installation – with all of the connotations given to it by *Il Populista* and the others actors of the right – acts as “violence against liberty.”¹² For *Il Populista*, these palms and bananas had come to represent a sort of cultural imperialism against the Milanese – foreign bodies of flora and man – that had been planted there without consent.

As a side note, unlike Salvini, *LN*, and *Il Populista*, Meloni and *FdI* did not comment on the issue at all, staying focused on national-wide socially conservative issues and not venturing into local politics.

Of all of the far right actors, *CPI* produced the most narrative content on the topic of the palm trees and bananas. On 18 February 2017, on their Twitter official account, *CPI* presented the changes as an “unacceptable choice, linking it to their Facebook page that expounded upon this description.¹³ In this Facebook post, it continued, presenting the move as “against the history and the traditions of the city,” “Africanization,” and a strategy of distraction by the city government to distract from social problems and unemployment.¹⁴

In its tweet from *Il Primato Nazionale* on 20 February 2017, *CPI* linked the palm trees to a wider historical background and then lobbied charges of hypocrisy against the “leftist” counter protesters.¹⁵ As it was explained in the linked article of *Il Primato Nazionale*, the

¹¹ Ilpopulista_it. (19 February 2017). “Quelle palme in piazza Duomo. Come fare incazzare i milanesi” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/833257114793553921; Alfredo Lissoni, “Quelle palme in piazza Duomo. Come fare incazzare i milanesi” *Il Populista*, 19 February 2017, <http://www.ilpopulista.it/news/19-Febbraio-2017/10934/quelle-palme-in-piazza-duomo-come-fare-incazzare-i-milanesi.html>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ CasaPoundItalia. (2017, 18 February). “Milano, CasaPound - Banani e palme in Piazza Duomo, CasaPound “scelta inaccettabile, una presa in giro alla... <http://fb.me/1PWs0weuS>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/CasaPoundItalia/status/833013613279457281>.

¹⁴ CasaPound Italia. 18 February 2017. “Milano, CasaPound - Banani e palme in Piazza Duomo, “scelta inaccettabile, una presa in giro alla storia e alle tradizioni della città...” [Facebook Post]. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/casapounditalia/posts/10154500870467842>.

¹⁵ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 20 February). “#cronaca: #Starbucks deturpa l'immagine di un simbolo e la sinistra insulta chi protesta #palmeMilano #IIPrimatoN” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/833648152062337024>.

palm trees, in the official description by the city government, were an homage to the palm trees that were placed in the main square during the 1800s – specifically in a colonial context from the conquest of Libya.¹⁶ Therefore, in this way, *CPI* was accusing those opposing them of a defense of imperialism and colonialism, a charge normally lobbied against the right. Nonetheless, this article also stressed the fact that the restyling project was initiated and put underway specifically by an “American multinational” corporation, infusing the whole issue with anti-globalization sentiments.

The narrative distinctions between *RaiNews* and the far right were in an almost complete dichotomy. *RaiNews* constructed an overwhelming positive view of the entire project in principally economic terms – focusing on jobs created – while the far right opposed the installation on primarily cultural terms, viewing it as an unwanted transformation and an affront to the history and architecture of the city, but nevertheless adding its own economic counter narrative. The tension between the narrative of the cultural hegemony and the counter hegemony explicitly shows a differentiation of values in this specific paradigm. The unrooted nexus of economic development clashed directly with the cultural and historic trappings that the actors of the far right – specifically from *CPI* – presented in response.

5.2 Rimini Rape – 25 August 2017 – 8 September 2017

On the night of 25 August 2017, a Polish couple was having their vacation on the beach in Rimini when they were approached by an individual who asked for their phones and wallets. At first, thinking that this was a robbery, the couple tried to flee, but three other individuals arrived, and then the man was beaten and the woman there was raped by all of the individuals. Afterward, this event was constructed by all internal actors – extensively by the far right.

RaiNews first reported on the rape the day after it happened, 26 August 2017, which was the first mention also of the nationality of the victims, who were Polish.¹⁷ The next day, 27 August 2017, was the most active day for *RaiNews* in regards to the rape, as it tweeted

¹⁶ Adriano Scianca. “Le palme a Milano e l’isteria della sinistra tutta impegno e frapuccino” *Il Primato Nazionale*. 20 February 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.IlPrimatoN.it/politica/le-palme-a-milano-e-listeria-della-sinistra-tutta-impegno-e-frapuccino-57892/>.

¹⁷ *RaiNews*. (2017, 26 August). “#rimini : lei violentata da quattro uomini in spiaggia, lui picchiato e derubato. Vittima coppia turisti polacchi → <http://goo.gl/vRZYHu>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/901423854438035456>.

five separate times on the matter. The narrative, which still trended toward an informative presentation of the events, mentioned the “brutality” of the rape.¹⁸ It also presented the statement of the victim, bringing in a level of emotionality, who was just asking for help to “return home.”¹⁹ The rest of the tweets and articles from this day just talked about the rape and the police search for the perpetrators.

30 August 2017 was *RaiNews*’ next mention of the rape. It focused on the fact that the rapists had been identified “beyond a shadow of a doubt” but did not go into depth in any sort of construction of who these rapists were beyond the fact that they had been identified.²⁰ In the last week of analysis, between 2 September 2017 and 5 September 2017, *RaiNews* finally capped off the full picture by presenting the accused rapists themselves. However, in its headline, *RaiNews* presented “two Moroccan minors” who had turned themselves into the police in Rimini, but within that headline, the rape itself was not mentioned.²¹ The next article, which mentioned the arrest of the rapists, included no mention of ethnicity or nationality.²² The last article posted on the Rimini rape, which quoted the leader of the rapists, Butungu, presented the others there during the rape as “only boys.”²³

Nonetheless, the last major point of *RaiNews*’ narrative came on 4 September 2017, during which the possibility of extradition of the accused rapists came into question due to an outside actor, the Polish government.²⁴ This possibility had not been mentioned as

¹⁸ RaiNews. (2017, 27 August). “Il dibattito su #sgomberi e regole e la brutale violenza di #Rimini: le prime pagine dei quotidiani in edicola → <http://goo.gl/x73Be2>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/901683491372445696>.

¹⁹ RaiNews. (2017, 27 August). “#Rimini, la ragazza polacca stuprata di fronte al fidanzato: "Vi prego, aiutateci a tornare a casa" → <http://goo.gl/s3hXp4>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/901760826285150208>.

²⁰ RaiNews. (2017, 30 August). “Stupro di gruppo a #Rimini, una delle vittime riconosce i quattro violentatori "senza ombra di dubbio" → <http://goo.gl/xpu84W>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/902927426925289473>.

²¹ RaiNews. (2017, 2 September). “Stupri di Rimini: due marocchini minorenni si sono presentati ai carabinieri di Pesaro che li stanno ascoltando → <http://goo.gl/bJkg7U>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/904007466970734593>.

²² RaiNews. (2017, 2 September). Stupri di #Rimini, hanno confessato i due minorenni che si erano presentati oggi ai Carabinieri di Pesaro → <http://goo.gl/DqMMbX>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/904013765108256770>.

²³ RaiNews. (2017, 5 September). “Stupri di #Rimini, Butungu cambia versione: "C'ero ma sono stati i ragazzini" → <http://goo.gl/c5gKqR>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/905042944641695744>.

²⁴ RaiNews. (2017, 4 September). “Stupri di Rimini: le pene per i reati ipotizzati superano i 20 anni. La Polonia vuole l'extradizione dei rei → <http://goo.gl/svEnW3>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/904729237764153344>.

a hypothetical outcome from the situation from *RaiNews* alone and instead only actualized from Poland as an external source.

In the totality of its narrative, *RaiNews* produced a primarily informative narrative regarding the rape. However, in its discursive linkages, *RaiNews* separated ethnicity or origin from criminals but not from the victims, who it stated from the very beginning were Polish nationals. Nonetheless, this did not mean an ignorance of the background of the accused rapists – *RaiNews* included two mentions of the youth of the culprits.

The actors of the far right, however, did not shy away from presenting the rape in Rimini as a part of their metanarrative, linking it to many other issues. Matteo Salvini was the single most vocal individual in response to the rape, with nine tweets within the two-week period of analysis. The day after the rape, Salvini responded that the perpetrators – whom he directly named as “worms” – deserved “chemical castration.”²⁵ Salvini continues in this manner, with the implication of physical violence, when he threatens to “kick” the cultural mediator who “defended the rape... in the balls.”²⁶ Even after the culprits were taken into prison on 2 September 2017, Salvini repeated such rhetoric; “if they are guilty, minors or not, it is chemical castration and then to send them home!”²⁷

Nonetheless, Salvini did not solely utilize this rhetoric of hard, physical justice in response to the rape. He also, on several occasions, deliberately brought in other actors and operationalized their own narratives for his own uses. The first of such motions came with Salvini stating how it was “strange” that all twenty of the suspects for the rape were migrants, and that he was still waiting for the “condemnation” of Laura Boldrini in response.²⁸ From this mention of Boldrini, Salvini tried to provoke a response from the President of the Chamber of Deputies, who, also, generally holds pro-migrant and pro-

²⁵ MatteoSalviniMi. (2017, 26 August). “Stuprata in spiaggia a Rimini davanti al marito, picchiato e derubato. Ci sono quattro vermi ricercati. Se li prendono: castrazione chimica.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/901536602681466881>.

²⁶ MatteoSalviniMi. (2017, 28 August). “Mediatore culturale immigrato difende lo stupro. Io lo rispedirei a casa a calci... nelle palle!” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/902147260036866049>.

²⁷ MatteoSalviniMi. (2017, 2 September). “Se colpevoli, minorenni o no, castrazione chimica e poi a casa loro! #Rimini” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/904017983701475329>.

²⁸ MatteoSalviniMi. (2017, 29 August). “Stupro di Rimini, la Polizia indaga su 20 sospetti. Sono tutti immigrati. Strano, vero? P.s. Attendiamo la condanna della Boldrini...” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/902562676911603721>.

European Union views. In addition, Boldrini was also running for Prime Minister for the left-leaning political party, *Liberi e Uguale*.

On 30 August 2017, Salvini would go on to even quote Boldrini, repeating what she had earlier stated, saying that “migrants offer a way of life that will soon be very dispersed among all of us.”²⁹ However, he would addend this statement, adding some commentary of his own; “good night to all of you, other than the accomplice.”³⁰ From this addendum, Salvini made his narrative completely clear: migrants bring a “way of life” exemplified by this rape, and that Boldrini, *i.e.*, by proxy the government in power, was an accomplice to this rape.

In addition, on 3 September 2017, Salvini also posted a collage of pictures of the lead rapist, Guerlin Butungo, with pictures taken from his Facebook profile. From Salvini’s perspective, this post was intended to raise the question of why, exactly, Butungo was receiving a stipend from the state as an asylum-seeker, and why he was an asylum-seeker in the first place, as, according to Salvini, his clothes in these pictures were too expensive for someone who supposedly was looking for a better life.³¹ Aside from the rape itself, the choice of this post by Salvini also reinforced the far right metanarrative that migrants are not coming to Italy for safety but solely for benefits.

Salvini also employed the use of sarcasm in the creation of a counter-narrative, saying that the fact that “two Moroccans” and “two Congolese” committing the rape was “strange” since they were “supposed to pay our pensions.”³² This response squares up against the ongoing narrative by the *PD*, as well as some other media sources, that migration will economic offset Italian demographic decline. In addition, this plays into his overall strategy of bringing Laura Boldrini into the wider conversation.

²⁹ MatteoSalviniMi. (2017, 30 August). “Boldrini: “migranti ci offrono uno stile di vita che presto sarà molto diffuso per tutti noi”. Buona notte a tutti voi, non alla complice.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/902659782837927936>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ MatteoSalviniMi. (2017, 3 September). “Vi presento Guerlin Butungo, accusato di essere il capobranco dello #stupro di #Rimini.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/904307208313339905>.

³² MatteoSalviniMi. (2017, 3 September). “Presi gli stupratori di #Rimini. Due marocchini e due congolesi. Strano. Non erano mica qui a pagarci le pensioni?” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/904264102784184321>.

Il Populista followed Salvini's narrative in a similar fashion, beginning with an informative post about the rape on 26 August 2017 but then automatically asserting the next day that the rape had been committed by four "Africans," without a specificity of how such information had been obtained, considering such a statement had not been released by the police.³³ However, on 29 August 2017, these four "Africans" became four "Maghrebi" as the narrative evolved and more information came out on the rape.³⁴ Throughout the entire period of analysis, until 7 September 2017, *Il Populista* would continue to present such informative articles about the developments in the case.

Il Populista also presented the cultural mediator as a rape apologist, but unlike Salvini, there was no threat of violence in this instance. On 28 August 2017, *Il Populista* reported on the comments that the cultural mediator made, stating that "women like rape" and that "after the horrible act... women treat it as a normal sexual rapport," tying it to shocked reactions from other media sources and *LN* politicians.³⁵ The article also continued to repeat the name of the cultural mediator and took indignation with the fact that he was studying law.³⁶ The message of the article directly secured the entire idea of this sort of "cultural mediation" as something tantamount to rape apologetics.

However, this volley against the cultural mediator was not the sole instance of linking this rape to failures of the government and the political left. On 1 September 2017, *Il Populista* forwarded the comments of Salvini, stating sarcastically "how beautiful is the Italy that Renzi is leaving with us" in regards to the rape, presenting this instance as a representative of the entire state of Italy under the Renzi and the *PD* government.³⁷ On 6 September 2017, this perception of failure continues in the presentation of a past

³³ ilpopulista_it. (2017, 26 August). "LA POLIZIA CERCA IL BRANCO Lei è stata violentata a ripetizione da quattro uomini; lui, aggredito e colpito al..." [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/901466846607679490; ilpopulista_it. (2017, 26 August). "++ #RIMINI: UNA #TURISTA POLACCA PICCHIATA E #STUPRATA IN SPIAGGIA DA QUATTRO #AFRICANI ++ Un amico della... <http://fb.me/5iyRcFxWa>" [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/901598663557963777.

³⁴ ilpopulista_it. (2017, 29 August). "ERANO PURE RECIDIVI I quattro magrebini avrebbero aggredito in strada a Miramare una coppia di turisti di Varese,..." [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/902523809684652034.

³⁵ Il Populista. "Bologna, il "mediatore culturale" Abid Jee: lo stupro? "Alle donne piace"" 28 August 2017. <http://www.ilpopulista.it/news/28-Agosto-2017/17867/bologna-il-mediatore-culturale-abid-jee-lo-stupro-alle-donne-piace.html>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ ilpopulista_it. (2017, 1 September). "Stupri di Rimini, Salvini: "Bell'Italia ci lascia Renzi"" [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/903668837475917824.

government policy to send money to Moroccans to return to their country of origin as a failed bribe illustrative of a failed government.³⁸ The clear implication of such a statement is that a new, differently oriented government should take its place - *LN*.

In addition, again in the same way as Salvini, *Il Populista* mentioned physical punishments – chemical castration and deportation – as the suitable punishment for the rapists, but it nonetheless framed the argument in a completely different fashion. While Salvini directly stated it as the just punishment, *Il Populista* brought its readership into the discourse by posing it as a question – “Rimini rape: chemical castration deportation. Do you agree?”³⁹ Nonetheless, this occurred on 9 September 2017, almost two weeks after Salvini first even fielded the possibility, and as such was framed as in such a way that if this did not occur (and per Italian law, this would not occur), then any punishment – save deportation to Poland for trial – would be unjust.

While not mentioning the rape the same amount, Giorgia Meloni paralleled Salvini’s and *Il Populista*’s discursive strategies in many ways, but she nonetheless added her own personal spin to the events. Two days after it took place, Meloni first mentioned the rape, linking it to “Italy being reduced to a South American favela,” including civilizational discourse on the matter.⁴⁰ Meloni also commented on the comments of the cultural mediator, although not completely in the same way that Salvini did. While Salvini appealed the direct violence of a “kick... in the balls,” Meloni said that the cultural mediator deserved to be “indicted and put in prison for the incitement of crime,” a state-sanctioned, law and order approach.⁴¹

Meloni, also like Salvini, also appealed directly to Laura Boldrini on 29 August 2017. However, unlike Salvini, Meloni directly messaged this point to her – from the perspective of a “woman, mother, and citizen” if Boldrini had nothing to say about the

³⁸ ilpopulista_it. (2017 6 September). “DOPO IL BRANCO DI RIMINI Paolini: “Lo Stato aveva offerto 20mila euro ai marocchini per tornare in Patria nel...” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/905362496369950720.

³⁹ ilpopulista_it. (2017, 9 September). “Stupro di Rimini: castrazione chimica rimpatrio. Sei d'accordo?” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/904250180526108672.

⁴⁰ GiorgiaMeloni. (2017, 27 August). “Donna stuprata e marito pestato a #Rimini: l'Italia ridotta a favela sudamericana. Ora massima mobilitazione per stanare i colpevoli ST” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/901725096733270017>.

⁴¹ GiorgiaMeloni. (2017, 28 August). “Allucinante il commento del #mediatore culturale sullo #stupro di #Rimini: va indagato e messo in galera per istigazione a delinquere ST” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/902198897543696390>.

rapes committed by the “Maghrebi worms” (again, mirroring Salvini’s use of animalizing language).⁴² Meloni again brought up the “worms,” linking it to the migration policy. These rapist “worms,” now “rotting in jail” were receiving the asylum stipend of 37 euros a day – markedly that “we” – being the Italian people – “maintain.”⁴³ Finally, on 6 September 2017, Meloni spoke about the issue one last time during the analysis period, again linking the Rimini rape to the wider migration policies of Italy. For Meloni, the “violence” in Rimini was the “collateral damage of uncontrolled immigration,” the logical consequence of the direction take by the state.⁴⁴

Both Salvini, *Il Populista*, and Meloni brought Poland into the discourse as well – Salvini on 4 September 2017 and Meloni on 5 September 2017. While Meloni’s response to the extradition response was in the positive, simply stating that it needed to be done “right away,” Salvini extrapolated this by saying that although “a bit of jail time will do them good, what justice is it?”⁴⁵ Poland’s migration policy – and its rejection of EU migration quotas – is not something lost to Salvini and Meloni. By so emphatically agreeing with the Polish requests, Salvini and Meloni made it implicitly clear that Poland provides justice, and in order for Italy to do the same, it should follow the Polish example.

Il Populista also made direct references to statements from members of the Polish government in marking that the Polish direction of justice toward the rapists would be more fitting a punishment than what they would receive in Italy. On 29 August 2017, the paper published the statements of the Polish vice Minister for Justice, Patryk Jasik, noted that the “death penalty” for them would be the fitting outcome as well as that “these are

⁴² GiorgiaMeloni. (2017, 29 August). “Lo chiedo da donna, madre, cittadina: @LauraBoldrini non ha nulla da dire sugli stupri commessi a Rimini da un branco di vermi magrebini? ST” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/902447651668586496>.

⁴³ GiorgiaMeloni. (2017, 3 September). “Presi presunti stupratori di #Rimini. Il capo branco è un richiedente asilo che manteniamo con 37€ al giorno. Ora vermi marciscano in galera” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/904267516234670083>.

⁴⁴ GiorgiaMeloni. (2017, 6 September). “Violenze #Rimini rientrano tra i danni collaterali #immigrazione incontrollata. Ne parlo oggi sul @tempoweb st” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/905346938110963712>.

⁴⁵ GiorgiaMeloni. (2017, 5 September). “#Rimini: Polonia chiede estradizione branco stupratori? Giusto, diamoglieli subito st” [Twitter Post]. <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/904970643472572416>; MatteoSalviniMi. (2017, 4 September). “La Polonia vuole i quattro presunti stupratori di Rimini. Mandiamoglieli, subito!!!! Cosi si fanno un bel po' di galera, ma quella giusta.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/904797822477901824>.

your migrants – do you want them here in Poland?”⁴⁶ The subtext of such was that these migrants – already linked to rape – would not be wanted in Italy either.

Of the far right actors, *CPI*, along with its online newspaper *Il Primato Nazionale*, produced the brunt of narrative and discursive ammunition in response to the rape. The day after the rape itself, *Il Primato Nazionale* marked that “four North Africans” committed the rape, bringing in the issue of race and ethnicity before any other actor.⁴⁷ In addition, *Il Primato Nazionale* refocused this event in reference to previous sexual violence committed by migrants, entitling this “Maghrebis with precedents,” strengthening this racializing narrative.⁴⁸ The newspaper also provided a mixture of presentation by linking all together the “minor” “Moroccans” with the “rape” itself, reaffixing the constitutive narrative parts that *RaiNews* would later present in separate portions regarding the rape.⁴⁹ At the end of the period, *Il Primato Nazionale* delivered its final metanarrative point, which was that “the Rimini rape shows that integration does not exist,” with its “refugees” and “new Italians.”⁵⁰

In addition, *CPI* tweeted that the major newspaper *Repubblica* was indignant that the accused rapists were being insulted.⁵¹ Through this, *CPI* linked what it views as mainstream media as being a defender of rape through its defense of migrants. *Il Primato Nazionale* acted similarly, saying that the “cultural mediator” in response to the rape was “pro-rape.”⁵² This follows Salvini’s and Meloni’s same logic as well from two days earlier.

⁴⁶ Il Populista. “Stupro di Rimini, viceministro polacco: "Ecco i vostri immigrati. Pena di morte"” 30 August 2017. <http://www.ilpopulista.it/news/29-Agosto-2017/17881/stupro-di-rimini-viceministro-polacco-ecco-i-vostri-immigrati-pena-di-morte.html>.

⁴⁷ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 26 August). “#Stuprata in spiaggia dal branco: a #Rimini è caccia a quattro nordafricani” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/901462767881814017>.

⁴⁸ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 27 August). “#Magrebini con precedenti: ecco i responsabili dello #stupro di gruppo di #Rimini” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/901731398578569216>.

⁴⁹ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 2 September). “#StuproRimini arrestati due minorenni #marocchini: “Siamo stati noi”” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/904030216074522624>.

⁵⁰ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 4 September). ““Profughi” con “nuovi italiani”: lo stupro di #Rimini dice che l’integrazione non esiste.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/904691880650301440>.

⁵¹ CasaPoundItalia. (2017, 4 September). “Stupro di Rimini: 'Repubblica' si indigna... per gli insulti allo stupratore” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/CasaPoundItalia/status/904619070724689920>.

⁵² IIPrimatoN. (2017, 30 August). “#Nigeriano uccise imprenditore: era ospite della stessa #coop del #mediatoreculturale pro-#stupri <https://goo.gl/A6W6oc>.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/902828066409467906>.

CPI, in this way, was the only actual political party to comment on the rapes. Markedly, neither of the party platforms of the major right wing actors – neither *LN* nor *FdI* – presented any narrative regarding the rape. The narratives came solely and completely from the individuals representing the parties, Salvini and Meloni. Inversely, di Stefano did not offer any comment on the events.

Overall, the narrative battle over the Rimini rape displayed a dichotomy of narrative presentation between the cultural hegemony and the counter hegemony of the far right. *RaiNews* primarily informed about the events following the rape, and only at the very end did any sort of racialization come into its narrative. Salvini and Meloni, being completely representative of *LN* and *FdI* in this case, only provided an informative narrative at the onset of the events – stating that this rape had occurred – before moving forward with suggesting calls to action, responses, and discursive linkages with meta-issues, specifically Italian migration policy. *CPI*, even in its preliminary present of the narrative immediately racialized the issue, presenting it as a rape committed by North Africans, and then moved forward with incorporating this occurrence with its metanarrative of immigration and migration policy as a whole.

In this case, *CPI* was the very first to present the narrative that would become dominant for the entirety of the far right, and would in fact even cursorily seep into that of *RaiNews*, if solely through the mention of ethnic background. The main difference between the counter hegemonic narrative and the culturally hegemonic one is that the culturally hegemonic narrative did not provide any issue-linkages.

5.3 FC Lazio Anne Frank Scandal – 23 October 2017 – 4 November 2017

On 23 October 2017, stickers depicting Anne Frank in the football jersey of Roma FC were discovered plastered outside of Rome's Olympia Stadium alongside anti-Semitic graffiti directed toward Roma FC fans. It was later discovered that the stickers were created by the ultras of Lazio FC, known for their right wing fanaticism. The event snowballed into a plethora of statements – from the government, the media, and the football clubs themselves – denouncing the stickers and the groups behind them, pledging to remedy the situation. *RaiNews* and *CPI* issued the all of the narrative framing regarding this event, going directly against each other at times. The actors of *LN* and *FdI* remained completely silent on the issue.

Of all the actors, *RaiNews* presented the widest berth of overall information and narrative in regards to the scandal. In the first three days after the initial story became known by the media at large, starting on 23 October 2017 onward, *RaiNews* tweeted nine separate times. The first of these messages first provided the basic information about the discovery of the “gift” of the Lazio ultras, which showed Anne Frank in a t-shirt of the Roma team with the implication that these fans would meet the same fate – the entirety of which *RaiNews* described as “shock.”⁵³ The next tweet on 23 October 2017 would go on to describe “anti-Semitic graffiti” written nearby where the stickers had been found, which would be characterized as being of “low character” by the Lazio team establishment.⁵⁴

24 October 2017 marked the largest amount of discursive construction from the side of *RaiNews*. From the beginning of the day, *RaiNews* informed on the how the President of the Lazio team would confirm a visit to a synagogue for all the players, along with a quote from Renzi that “the teams [should be] on the field with the Star of David,” rebroadcasting the governmental view on the matter.⁵⁵ *RaiNews* continued by reporting on how the Lazio team establishment would now send two hundred fans a year to Auschwitz as an “official initiative” in order to “not forget.”⁵⁶

Nonetheless, these statements did not cause the indignity surrounding the event to subside. On 24 October 2017, during the minute of silence for Anne Frank, which was ordered to take place during the upcoming football matches, ultras “shouted anti-Semitic” cheers, on which *RaiNews* again described.⁵⁷ *RaiNews* reported on this story again on 25

⁵³ RaiNews. (2017, 23 October). “Choc all'Olimpico: Anna Frank con la maglia della Roma, il “dono” dei tifosi laziali alla Curva Sud → <http://goo.gl/VyLq7m>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/922490358537375746>.

⁵⁴ RaiNews. (2017, 23 October). “Scritte antisemite allo stadio Olimpico, indaga la Questura. La A.s. Lazio parla di “pochissimi sconsiderati” → <http://goo.gl/Hzn8Gd>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/922557545377681408>.

⁵⁵ RaiNews. (2017, 24 October). “#AnnaFrank Lotito conferma la visita in sinagoga. Renzi: “Squadre in campo con la stella di David” → <http://goo.gl/5KRrru>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/922758582852112384>.

⁵⁶ RaiNews. (2017, 24 October). “Presidente Lazio Lotito: “ogni anno 200 tifosi a Auschwitz”, è l'iniziativa ufficiale appena annunciata alla stampa. #AnnaFrank” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/922767758999326721>; RaiNews. (2017, 24 October). “L'annuncio del presidente della Lazio Lotito alla stampa: “ogni anno 200 giovani a Auschwitz per non dimenticare” → <http://goo.gl/kAkT87>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/922775828236292096>.

⁵⁷ RaiNews. (2017, 24 October). “Adesivi antisemiti allo stadio, gli Ultra' dell'Ascoli: disertiamo il minuto per #AnnaFrank → <http://goo.gl/Nyd3QT>.” Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/922884048627920897>.

October 2017, adding the comments of the mayor of Ascoli, who characterized these cheers as “the gravest damage to the image of the city.”⁵⁸

The last piece of *RaiNews*’ narrative on the scandal, from 25 October 2017, conveyed that sixteen of the fans involved with the production of the stickers had been identified, and that the Lazio ultras renounced going to the upcoming game in Bologna where readings from Anne Frank’s diary would take place before the game.⁵⁹ This tweet also stressed – by way of outward implication – that the polemic surrounding the issue “would not stop,” although the polemic had mainly been reproduced by *RaiNews* in the first place.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, for the rest of the two-week period of analysis, *RaiNews* did not mention the scandal any more.

RaiNews’ narrative was incredibly clear and focused: neither racism nor anti-Semitism will be accepted in Italy, and any act of either will be widely covered, denounced, and disciplined, as seen through the automatic reaction by the football league and the Lazio administration. Both racism and anti-Semitism are considered damaging and even its very existence would be considered a shock. For those first three days after the sticker first was found, this event dominated *RaiNews*’ overall coverage, completely overshadowing any other events. This narrative dominance amongst all the issues reported between 23 and 25 October 2017 is especially striking considering the fact that the Catalanian independence referendum had occurred in the same period. Nonetheless and by far, *RaiNews* focused on this event more than all of the other actors combined.

Moving away from *RaiNews* and the culturally hegemonic discourses, neither Meloni nor Salvini – nor their respective parties – addressed the scandal in any way, even by recognition that it occurred. This absence served to distance both parties from any accusations of racism or anti-Semitism, which could poison the electoral success of any far right or right-leaning party. As there was no apparent reason for either party to get involved, as neither were named or linked to the event, their distance allowed them to

⁵⁸ RaiNews. (2017, 25 October). “#Ascoli, ultrà disertano minuto silenzio per #AnnaFrank. Il sindaco: "Gravissimo danno d'immagine per la città → <http://goo.gl/c372YT>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/923057560718053376>.

⁵⁹ RaiNews. (2017, 25 October). “#AnnaFrank 16 tifosi identificati. Irriducibili rinunciano alla trasferta di Bologna. Ma la polemica non si placa → <http://goo.gl/m5cnCT>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/923150775366443008>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

keep their metaphorical hands clean. This being said, the far right as a totality was not completely silent in the face of this scandal.

All the same, *CPI* did not shy from this controversy and produced three tweets regarding the stickers and anti-Semitism, and unlike *LN* and *FdI*, it did not only avoid the narrative produced by the cultural hegemony but instead went against it directly. On 25 October 2017, two days after the stickers had been found, *Il Primato Nazionale* published a story about the expected “theater” surrounding the issue of Anne Frank.⁶¹ For *CPI*, the fact that there was such indignation about the holocaust and Anne Frank and not about the deaths of Italians in the *foibe* showed that, for them, such manufactured outrage only served political ends.⁶² After the ultras cheered during the moment of silence for Anne Frank, *Il Primato Nazionale* continued with this narrative, stating that the strategy of boosting this event to such a highly visible level had acted as a “boomerang” in that it showed that not everyone shared the same universal indignation.⁶³

Through *Il Primato Nazionale*, *CPI* was also able to integrate the *foibe* narrative into the entirety of the scandal. The online paper tweeted about the “ignoble jeers” that “do not make the news,” bringing to light the celebration of some Italian leftist groups of the “*foibe*,” or the ethnic cleansing of Italians from Yugoslavian Istria after the Second World War.⁶⁴ For *CPI*, this boosted coverage of the Anne Frank stickers and the relative silence of culturally hegemonic media regarding another institutionalized mass killing was an equivalence to an “apology” for the matter.⁶⁵

As an extreme right party, *CPI* operates more ideologically rather than taking electoral success into its calculus, which helps in the explanation of its choice to comment on the matter in the first place. As such, this allowed *CPI* much greater freedom in their content production than either *LN* or *FdI* would be allowed for themselves. In addition, their supporters are also mainly ideological in their own personal calculi, and in this way, any

⁶¹ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 25 October). “#AnnaFrank: i tredicenni eversivi e un teatrino che non serviva” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/923091720690118657>.

⁶² Adriano Scianca. “Anna Frank: i tredicenni eversivi e un teatrino che non serviva.” 25 October 2017. *Il Primato Nazionale*. <http://www.IIPrimatoN.it/cronaca/74649-74649/>.

⁶³ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 26 October). “Fischi e cori: il minuto per #AnnaFrank negli stadi è un boomerang” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/923472744322387968>.

⁶⁴ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 25 October). “Quel #tifo ignobile che non fa notizia: #Stalin, fischi ai caduti italiani e apologia delle #Foibe” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/923188698866384896>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

sort of accusations of anti-Semitism or racism would not affected them in the same way it would for members of *LN* or *FdI*.

As per the overall narrative regarding the scandal, *RaiNews* presented the creation of these stickers as a societal transgression and did not allow for any sort of alternative viewpoint – such as that of *CPI* – to be allowed any space for reproduction. While *CPI* did not go into a vein of holocaust denialism or any sort of explicitly racial counter narratives, it did provide its own tangent that focused primarily on the instrumentalization of the holocaust for political purposes in addition to the *foibe*'s insignificance for what it views as mainstream, hegemonic media. Nonetheless, this far right narrative remained localized solely within the extreme right, and it did not find any reproduction outside of that discursive sphere.

5.4 German Imperial Flag Scandal – 2 December 2017 – 16 December 2017

On 2 December 2017, a video surfaced on the internet that showed the inside of a police barracks in Florence when filmed from the outside through a window. Hanging on the wall in the middle of the room was a large red, black, and white flag with the iron cross, which had been used by the Imperial German navy but also more recently by neo-Nazi groups. From this initial posting of the video, it spread throughout social media and digital sources, eventually coming to influence the narratives of *RaiNews*, *Il Populista*, and *CPI*.

RaiNews first presented the event on the same day of 2 December 2017 as breaking new, presenting the flag in the room as “neo-Nazi” in character.⁶⁶ An hour and a half later, conversely, *RaiNews* restructured this initial narrative, describing this flag as “a German war flag used by Nazis against the Weimar Republic,” still stressing the Nazi ties of the flag but nonetheless allowing for some discursive distance between the “Nazi” connotations and the flag itself.⁶⁷ However, on 3 December 2017, *RaiNews* shifts back to its initial description as the flag as “neo-Nazi” once again when labeling the flag in relation to an investigation conducted by the military prosecutor on the matter, which in

⁶⁶ RaiNews. (2017, 2 December). “Firenze. Bandiera neonazista spunta nella camerata di una caserma dei Carabinieri. <http://goo.gl/TgRN1y>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/937037244191342592>.

⁶⁷ RaiNews. (2017, 3 December). “#Firenze. Il significato della bandiera di guerra tedesca usata dai nazisti contro la Repubblica di Weimar e ora esposta nella caserma dei Carabinieri → <http://6goo.gl/sxanCe>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/937054954317074432>.

turn cemented its presentation of the neo-Nazi flag to be a symbol directly tied to Matteo Salvini with “an assault rifle in his hand.”⁶⁸

During the two-week period of analysis, not a single actor from either of the major far right parties – *LN* and *FdI* – even touches upon the issue. This silence is especially puzzling since a poster of Matteo Salvini was situated next to the German Imperial flag, which could, in theory, elicit some sort of response from Salvini himself.⁶⁹ In addition, in comparison with other issues, Salvini and Meloni are quite present in making their opinions and personal understandings of political narratives known, so their silence in response to this event amounts to a conscious choice to distance themselves from the flag, especially in the case of Salvini.

However, *Il Populista* does publish two articles on the events, the first of which from 4 December 2017 presenting the hegemonic narrative of the neo-Nazi flag to be “FAKE NEWS.”⁷⁰ In addition, this “FAKE NEWS” is presented as either ignorance of the “left and the *grillini*” (supporters of *Movimento 5 Stelle*) if not outright “deception,” implying that such a connotation or connection between Salvini and the flag was strategy to smear the party leader’s reputation.⁷¹ The article goes on to stress the Prussian origins of the flag and situate it in an anti-Nazi paradigm, as some former Prussian military officers had mutinied against Hitler. *Il Populista* also forwarded another article on the same day, stressing that such symbols that existed on the Imperial German flag predated Third Reich and the German Empire – going all the way back to Charlemagne and the Holy Roman Empire – so as such they constitute European heritage and only an act of “hypocrisy” would conflate them with Nazi ideology.⁷²

⁶⁸ RaiNews. (2017, 3 December). “#Bandiera neonazista nella caserma dei Carabinieri a Firenze, la Procura militare avvia un’indagine → <http://goo.gl/iDaeff>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/937382468981846017>; “Bandiera neonazista, avviata indagine della Procura Militare” RAINews, accessed 12 March 2018, <http://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/bandiera-neonazista-Firenze-Procura-Militare-1a2a45b8-61b0-49e1-83b4-d19466fecf07.html?refresh.ce>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Il Populista. “Carabiniere nazista? No, solo ignoranza (o malafede) da parte di sinistra e grillini,” 4 December 2017, <http://www.ilpopulista.it/news/4-Dicembre-2017/21063/carabiniere-nazista-no-solo-ignoranza-o-malafede-da-parte-di-sinistra-e-grillini.html>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Il Populista. “Vedono nazisti ovunque, anche quando si tratta di Carlo Magno.” 4 December 2017. <http://www.ilpopulista.it/news/4-Dicembre-2017/21074/vedono-nazisti-ovunque-anche-quando-si-tratta-di-carlo-magno.html>.

In a similar fashion, the actors of *CPI* did not remain silent in the face of this news and presented a counter narrative of the event in response, and the brunt of this response came from *Il Primato Nazionale*. Two hours after the post of *RaiNews* and a day before the post of *Il Populista* on 3 December 2017, *Il Primato Nazionale* presents the creation of “#fakenews” in relation to the flag, focusing on the fact that the flag was, as a symbol, originally the ensign of the German Imperial Navy.⁷³ *Il Primato Nazionale* continues in this vein the next day, 4 December 2017, expounding upon the “#fakenews” aspect of the larger narrative of the Nazi-connected flag. In fact, *Il Primato Nazionale* presents the German Imperial flag not as a Nazi flag, but invert the situation completely, stating that such a flag represents the Prussian tradition within the German military, specifically the “Prussian hero” of Count Klaus von Stauffenberg who tried to assassinate Adolf Hitler in Operation Valkyrie – in the way that *Il Populista* would also present the flag later.⁷⁴ To the thesis of *RaiNews* and the culturally hegemonic narrative, *CPI* provided a complete antithesis.

However, when looking outside of the narrative of only *Il Primato Nazionale* for *CPI*, Simone di Stefano pushed forward the narrative presentation of the flag in a completely divergent direction. He tweeted, that “if it is the flag of the Kaiser is not good (and it is not good) because we fought against them, then neither is the flag of the United States or the United Kingdom.”⁷⁵ This discursive linkage makes both the German Empire and the United States and Great Britain all imperial equivalents, which to di Stefano signifies a logical opposition.

As per the overall narrative construction of the flag scandal, *RaiNews* and *CPI* show the complete struggle for the framing of the event. Nevertheless, the two poles of *RaiNews*

⁷³ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 3 December). “Come ti creo una #fakenews: la “#bandiera #nazista” nella caserma dei #Carabinieri” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/937259257589846016>.

⁷⁴ IIPrimatoN. (2017, 4 December). “Tra #FakeNews e ignoranza, la “bandiera nazista” diventa “neonazista”” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/937725550860423169>; “Tra fake news e ignoranza, la “bandiera nazista” diventa “neonazista”,” *Il Primato Nazionale*, accessed 12 March 2018, <http://www.IIPrimatoN.it/cronaca/tra-fake-news-e-ignoranza-la-bandiera-nazista-diventa-neonazista-76533/>.

⁷⁵ diStefanoTW. (2017, 3 December) “@lucatelese @OGiannino Se non va bene (e non va bene) la bandiera del Kaiser perché abbiamo combattuto contro di loro, allora non va bene neanche la bandiera USA e GB. Ricordiamocelo.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/diStefanoTW/status/937582907090178048>.

and *CPI* created competing alternating narratives. Instead of any of the narrative elements of the cultural hegemony of *RaiNews* affecting the counter hegemonic element of *CPI*, *CPI* took a narrative piece of *RaiNews*' general story – that the flag was used by the Imperial German navy – and completely inverted it to act as an absolute opposition to what *RaiNews* had originally constructed. For *CPI*, this flag was forwarded not as a neo-Nazi flag but instead as an anti-Nazi flag as per the von Stauffenberg aside.

5.5 Macerata - 3 February 2018 – 17 February 2018

On the morning of 3 February 2018, outside of the Macerata train station, Luca Traini drove by and opened fire targeted at suspected migrants of African origin. In total, he shot five individuals, sending them all to the hospital. After his shooting spree, Traini then parked his car in front of Macerata's war memorial, and when the police finally arrested him there, Traini gave a Roman salute while he had the Italian flag draped around his shoulders. Later it would be uncovered that Traini had previously run for a local governmental seat as a member of *LN*. This event would be covered by all actors, who would all represent the plurality of narratives resulting for this event, which had the largest narrative impact of all the analyzed events.

RaiNews, representing the cultural hegemony, provided the largest trove of both information and narrative from any single source, with 37 tweets regarding Macerata during the two-week period of analysis. On the day of the shootings, 3 February 2018, *RaiNews* tweeted seven separate times, beginning with three informative posts while the situation was still in development and then evolving into a presentation of a “racist raid” by an individual “clad in the tricolor” and giving “a Roman salute.”⁷⁶ On 4 February 2018, *RaiNews* continued in this same fashion, presenting Traini (now known as the shooter) as a neo-fascist with a copy of *Mein Kampf*, a black flag with a white Celtic cross, and other items “associated with the extreme right.”⁷⁷ Such a statement had discursively linked the

⁷⁶ RaiNews. (2018, 3 February). “Sparatorie #Macerata, fermato presunto responsabile. Avvolto da una bandiera tricolore fa il saluto romano e urla "Viva l'Italia" → <http://bit.ly/2nAVF8i>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/959771355704102912>.; RaiNews. (2018, 3 February). “Raid razzista a #Macerata. La testimonianza di uno dei feriti: "Sono stato colpito ad una gamba" → <http://bit.ly/2EdUEXq>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/959828913647243264>.

⁷⁷ RaiNews. (2018, 4 February). “Raid razzista a Macerata, Traini in isolamento in carcere. Sequestrati a casa di Traini una copia del Mein Kampf, una bandiera con la croce celtica e altre pubblicazioni riconducibili all'estrema destra → <http://bit.ly/2ECUHR0>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/960095860855070720>.

murders with any far right actors. The rests of the tweets from 4 February 2018 continued this message, stressing the racist nature of the attack. On 5 February 2018, *RaiNews* even reported on Turkish President Tayyip Recep Erdogan’s response to the attack, who was visiting Rome at the time. He characterized the Macerata attacks as a “racist attack,” which deserved a “decisive response.”⁷⁸

On 5 February 2018 as well, *RaiNews* first linked the shootings to the murder of Pamela Mastropietro, with Traini’s shooting representing an act of vengeance.⁷⁹ In addition, *RaiNews* stopped its presentation of the attacks as a racist incident. However, on 6 February 2018, *RaiNews* began to shift its focus of Macerata to have Mastropietro exist as a separate narrative, focusing on events solely linked to this murder.⁸⁰ In addition, *RaiNews* also reported on demonstrations both by the “extreme right,” “anti-racists,” and “anti-fascists” (described by *RaiNews* as “peaceful”) in Macerata in relation to the shootings.⁸¹ Nonetheless, 12 February 2018 was the last mention of Macerata in any form, and in this sense, it focused primarily on the murder of Mastropietro. The four tweets of *RaiNews* focused on the imprisonment of a fourth suspect in her murder, while also mentioning a statement of her uncle urging the authorities to “stay civil.”⁸²

Regarding the Macerata shootings, *FdI*’s Giorgia Meloni only directly mentioned the shootings by Traini only once. Not giving an immediate response to the event, Meloni tweeted, “he who shoots at innocents is not my Italy” two days after the shootings took

⁷⁸ RaiNews. (2018, 5 February). “#Erdogan è a Roma, incontri e proteste. Il Presidente turco: "Quello di #Macerata è stato un attacco razzista, serve una reazione decisa" → <http://bit.ly/2nIuzME>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/960399421082144768>.

⁷⁹ RaiNews. (2018, 5 February). “#Macerata Luca Traini: "Volevo andare in tribunale e colpire l'assassino di Pamela" → <http://bit.ly/2E3r0LM>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/960506336659361794>.

⁸⁰ RaiNews. (2018, 6 February). “#Macerata finita udienza di convalida: Traini resta in carcere → <http://bit.ly/2BZEUJ4>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/960950724946464769>.

⁸¹ RaiNews. (2018, 9 February). “Cariche della polizia a #Macerata per una manifestazione organizzata da Forza Nuova. Violato il divieto del Questore. Erano una quarantina gli attivisti del movimento di ultradestra, guidati da Roberto Fiore → <http://bit.ly/2sjrmIN>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/961736647044993024>; RaiNews. (2018, 9 February). “È stata infine autorizzata la manifestazione prevista per domani a #Macerata "una manifestazione pacifica per ribadire i valori dell'antifascismo e dell'antirazzismo”” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/962034253344137217>.

⁸² RaiNews. (2018, 12 February). “Omicidio di Pamela, c’è un quarto indagato. Nuovo sopralluogo Ris nell'appartamento di via Spalato a #Macerata → <http://bit.ly/2G8qXep>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/963027427516698624>; RaiNews. (2018, 12 February). “Lo zio di #Pamela ai Nigeriani e al sindaco di #Macerata: "Costituitevi parte civile" → <http://bit.ly/2nUHAU6>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/RaiNews/status/962999675619069952>.

place.⁸³ Her next and final tweet regarding the events took a conspiratorial tone, alleging that the Ministry of Internal Affairs could have stopped the shootings but decided not to do so because the electoral campaign had begun, hinting that such optics of the right would harm them in the election.⁸⁴ However, Meloni did not ignore the totality of dealings in Macerata completely, and in the stead of focusing on the shootings, she decidedly took her narrative in an inverse direction.

In its place, Meloni's Macerata was not one focused on Traini yet instead one focused on Pamela Mastropietro, a woman who had been murdered in Macerata several weeks earlier, allegedly one of the triggers for Traini's shooting spree. On 7 February 2018, Meloni tweeted about the "bastard drug-dealing Nigerian" who killed Mastropietro, remarking that he had been involved in other crimes and not caught, implying again the ineptness or nefariousness of the ruling government.⁸⁵ Meloni's remaining four tweets regarding Macerata all focused on Mastropietro and the Nigerians, only referring to the shootings once again by remarking that the government was privileging the victims of the shooting to distract from the previous murder.⁸⁶

The party account of *FdI* acted more proactively in presenting their narrative of events that more or less mirrored that of Meloni. On 4 February 2018, *FdI* stated that the President and the government were "making excuses" for the shootings.⁸⁷ Afterward, the *FdI* account extrapolated on this claim, stating that the *PD* had created an environment of "fear and mistrust toward irregular migrants," blaming the ruling government for the

⁸³ GiorgiaMeloni. (2018, 5 February). "Quella che si mette a sparare contro gli innocenti non è la mia Italia". ST #tagadala7 #Macerata" [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/960511234650116096>.

⁸⁴ GiorgiaMeloni. (2018, 8 February). "La verità è che il ministro dell'Interno non ha fermato gli sbarchi perché aveva previsto la sparatoria a #Macerata ma perché stava arrivando la campagna elettorale. E se la sinistra vencesse le #elezioni, cosa che fortunatamente non accadrà, riprenderebbe a farci invadere" [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/961556486391558144>.

⁸⁵ GiorgiaMeloni. (2018, 7 February). "Il bastardo spacciatore nigeriano che ha fatto a pezzi Pamela non è stato accusato di omicidio in fase di convalida dell'arresto. Spero sia solo una scelta procedurale, perché sarebbe un precedente gravissimo. Continueremo a seguire attentamente gli sviluppi. ST" [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/961179263385956352>.

⁸⁶ GiorgiaMeloni. (2018, 10 February). "Salgono a cinque i nigeriani sospettati dell'omicidio di #Pamela. L'autopsia racconta che è stata fatta a pezzi con cura e che il suo cuore è sparito. Ma oggi a #Macerata il corteo lo fanno contro il razzismo, non contro gli spacciatori nigeriani. Siete ridicoli!" [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/962245561025028098>.

⁸⁷ fratelliditalia. (2018, February 4). "Presidente Repubblica e Governo pretendano scuse per parole su fatti Macerata <http://www.GiorgiaMeloni.it/2018/02/04/presidente-repubblica-governo-pretendano-scuse-parole-fatti-macerata/> ..." [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/FratellidItalia/status/960223089320751104>.

shooting instead, an inversion of the *RaiNews* strategy.⁸⁸ Then, starting on 7 February and continuing through 14 February 2018, *FdI* sustained a refocusing of Macerata on Pamela Mastropietro, tweeting on the subject 16 separate times.

Compared to Meloni and *FdI*, Matteo Salvini forwarded a much more bombastic narrative regarding the shootings in Macerata but nonetheless followed the same general pattern. On the day of the shooting, Salvini tweeted that violence “is always condemned” but nonetheless goes on to blame “open immigration” for bringing “chaos, anger, and social clash” without directly mentioning any of the specifics of the shooting.⁸⁹ The next day, Salvini goes on to advocate for the deportation of migrants in order to safeguard against future attacks like that of Macerata.⁹⁰ Such a statement nonetheless implicitly shields Traini from culpability for the shooting, as it implies that it would not have occurred if the migrants had not been in Macerata in the first place. Nonetheless, Salvini acted much more proactively than Meloni regarding in his framing of the event.

However, on 10 February 2018, Salvini reproduced the same narrative of Meloni about Pamela Mastropietro, decidedly striving to shift the focus of the Macerata association from Traini to that of Pamela, claiming that the left in their demonstrations were ignoring the migrant crimes that led to this death.⁹¹ He goes on to condemn the protests of the left in Macerata, saying that “as an Italian,” he was ashamed by the rallies – leading with the statement that he would bring back “normalcy” to Italy.⁹² Salvini’s Twitter narrative on

⁸⁸ fratelliditalia. (2018, February 4). “Macerata, Rampelli: Responsabilità del Pd è di aver creato paura e diffidenza verso gli stranieri irregolari <http://www.fratelli-italia.it/2018/02/06/macerata-rampelli-responsabilita-del-pd-aver-creato-paura-diffidenza-verso-gli-stranieri-irregolari/> ...” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/FratellidItalia/status/960897431306108934>.

⁸⁹ matteosalvinimi. (2018, 3 February). “La violenza non è mai la soluzione, la violenza è sempre da condannare. E chi sbaglia, deve pagare. L’immigrazione fuori controllo porta al caos, alla rabbia, allo scontro sociale. L’immigrazione fuori controllo porta spaccio di droga, furti, rapine e violenza. #Macerata” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/959821942831435776>.

⁹⁰ matteosalvinimi. (2018, 4 February). “#Salvini: La violenza è sempre da condannare. Ho però il dovere di dire agli italiani COME evitare i fatti come quelli di Macerata. Un esempio? Rimpatriando i clandestini. #nonelarena @nonelarena” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/960238233069158406>.

⁹¹ matteosalvinimi. (2018, 10 February). “Sono tre gli immigrati fermati con l’accusa di aver ucciso e fatto a pezzi la povera PAMELA. Ma oggi la sinistra manifesta “contro il razzismo”, Pamela e gli italiani vittime della violenza dei clandestini possono aspettare... #stopimmigrazione” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/962385481370685440>.

⁹² matteosalvinimi. (2018, 11 February). “Da italiano mi vergogno della sfilata di Macerata. Non vedo l’ora di riportare, con il vostro aiuto, un po’ di NORMALITÀ e di BUONSENSO in questo Paese. Mancano 20 giorni.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/962652643452686336>.

Macerata during the two-week analysis ends by tying his speech acts all together by coming back to Pamela, saying that no matter if a criminal is “white or black,” that they would pay for their crimes nonetheless.⁹³

The *LN* account mirrored Salvini almost perfectly. The first mention of the Macerata shootings was on 3 February 2018, and the account tweeted that “now is the time for justice, swift and without softness.”⁹⁴ As with most of its posts, the *LN* account also provided a link to its full statement on Facebook. The next day, the account boosted Salvini’s message yet again, providing a statement from him that specified that “the invasion of migrants leads to social clash.”⁹⁵ However, after these initial declarations the days directly following the shootings, the *LN* started to realign the narrative of Macerata with the murder of Mastropietro, first focusing on her mother and then, for the rest of the analysis period, continued to stress the event for another 22 tweets, all repeating the same narrative points of Pamela and her murder.⁹⁶ One of these tweets referenced to possible “cannibalism” by the Nigerian mafia that occurred after the murder.⁹⁷ The only other references to Macerata during this time were references to violence resulting from leftist demonstrations there in response to the shooting but nothing else on neither Traini nor the shooting itself.⁹⁸

While some of these posts were republished on the *LN* official account, *Il Populista* circulated an unprecedented amount of Tweets regarding Macerata – 33 in total, every single day between 4 February and 14 February. However, only two of these tweets even mentioned the shooting itself, and the rest of them focused solely on the affairs

⁹³ matteosalvinimi. (2018, 11 February). “#Salvini: Pamela? Nell'Italia che ho in mente chi sbaglia paga, bianco o nero che sia. Per assassini e stupratori non ci possono essere sconti di pena! #Mezzorainpiu” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/962652643452686336>.

⁹⁴ legasalvini. (2018, 3 February). “MACERATA. ORA GIUSTIZIA SIA RAPIDA E SENZA SCONTI VERSO QUESTO CRIMINALE CHE HA SPARATO MA ANCHE CON L'ASSASSINO...” <https://fb.me/GBhXXggB>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/LegaSalvini/status/959827709735075845>.

⁹⁵ legasalvini. (2018, 4 February). “++ IL PIÙ LETTO DI IERI ++ Macerata, Salvini: "L'invasione di immigrati porta allo scontro sociale”” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/LegaSalvini/status/960061671594131458>.

⁹⁶ legasalvini. (2018, 5 February). “++ IL PIÙ LETTO DI OGGI ++ La mamma di Pamela: "No alla violenza, ma da italiana capisco... siamo stanchi!” <https://fb.me/8kmXfbsgH>” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/LegaSalvini/status/960605273407787008>.

⁹⁷ legasalvini. (2018, 12 February). “++ IL PIÙ LETTO DI IERI ++ Omicidio Pamela, Meluzzi: "Cannibalismo rituale della mafia nigeriana” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/LegaSalvini/status/962960769846476800>.

⁹⁸ legasalvini. (2018, 10 February). “"Da italiano mi vergogno per la manifestazione di Macerata”” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/LegaSalvini/status/962426007948087301>.

surrounding the Mastropietro murder. The only reason that *Il Populista* even mentioned the shootings came from a defense of Salvini in response to political accusations that blamed Salvini's rhetoric for creating an environment in which such violence could occur. The response from *Il Populista* on 12 February 2017? Everything seems to be "Salvini's fault" – and this seemed to be the government's response to any unfortunate occurrence.⁹⁹

The tweets in relation to the Pamela Mastropietro murder from the side of *Il Populista* focused deeply on the origins of the murderers and narratively linking this to "African" practices of cannibalism and "ju-ju." On 4 February 2018, the day after the shootings, *Il Populista* had already published a tweet and linked article on the topic of a "journey into the world of African animism," and on 10 February 2018, this line of discussion continues by asking "was it African magic?"¹⁰⁰ One of these tweets, from 11 February 2018, rhetorically involves the readership in this discourse by posing it as a question – "Pamela's murder, do you see it as a tribal rite?"¹⁰¹ This question has already primed the reader to frame the incident in the light of this African ritual, making the crime explicitly non-Italian, and framing the murder as being something completely outside of the realm of possibility for Italians to commit because its explicit linkages to the migrant other. With the other tweets and articles proceeding this one, it is already expected that the reader sees it as a foreign, tribal ritual. This narrative of the incompatible African other was reproduced one more time on 14 February 2018, during which *Il Populista* reported that in Nigeria, women and children were regularly "cut to pieces," presenting this as a normalized occurrence there.¹⁰² The implication to the article was linked to the physical presence of people from such cultures would be that such normalized practices would follow them.

⁹⁹ ilpopulista_it. (2018, 12 February) "'MACERATA? COLPA DI SALVINI' Le 'associazioni cattoliche' chiedono l'approvazione dello Ius soli, la..." [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/963123088257896448.

¹⁰⁰ ilpopulista_it. (2018, 4 February). "VIAGGIO NEL MONDO DELL'ANIMISMO AFRICANO Vudù, umbanda, candomblé, santeria, Palo mayombe sono alcuni dei..." [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/960103214602489856; ilpopulista_it. (2018, 4 February).

"CENTRA LA MAGIA TRIBALE AFRICANA? E intanto sale a tre il numero degli indagati per la morte della giovane. E..." [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/962363108424585216.

¹⁰¹ ilpopulista_it. (2018, 11 February). "Omicidio di Pamela, per te c'entra il rito tribale?" [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/962604717259059200.

¹⁰² ilpopulista_it. (2018, 14 February). "IN NIGERIA "BAMBINI E DONNE" FATTI A PEZZI Il legale di uno degli indagati: "Forse un rito dietro la mattanza"..." [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/963722060735315969

In keeping with this explicitly anti-immigrant message stressing the African origins of Mastropietro's murderers, *Il Populista* published an article on 13 February 2018 in response to Pope – calling him Bergoglio instead of Pope Francis – that reframed his argument that “migrants only commit 40 percent of rapes” by refactoring it into a question of what percent migrants actually are within Italian society, and that this would actually point to them being over-represented in such statistics.¹⁰³ The linked article also has in its headline a picture of Pope Francis with a group of Africans. In addition, by calling him Bergoglio instead of using his pontifical title, *Il Populista* distances him from being able to legitimately represent the “evil ... Catholics,” who in turn make up over 70 percent of Italy's population and by proxy, *Il Populista's* readers.¹⁰⁴ While the Catholic Church itself stays away from any scrutiny by *Il Populista*, any elements of the Church, *i.e.*, the Pope, who convey messages contrary to that of *Il Populista* receives a direct response in the direction of negation.

The other tweets and articles from *Il Populista* mirrored the general trends from *LN*, Salvini, Meloni, and *FdI*. The narrative tendencies drifted from blaming the government for inaction against criminals due to their migrant background as of its tweets and articles from 6, 7, and 8 February 2018 to a generalized reporting of the unfolding events around the murder itself, nonetheless, not giving any narrative space to the Traini shootings.¹⁰⁵ The only instance of giving some sort of parallel recognition of the events came through an article on the comments of Mastropietro's mother, who – while condemning the shooting spree and denouncing any sort of violence – still noted that “as an Italian, we

¹⁰³ ilpopulista_it. (2018, 13 February). “PER BERGOGLIO I "CATTIVI" SONO I CATTOLICI Il Pontefice: "Immigrati solo il 40% degli stupratori". Già, però sono...” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/963339531612246017; Il Populista, “Il Papa sui criminali stranieri: "Sporcati dai commenti, la realtà viene travisata,”” 13 February 2018, <http://www.ilpopulista.it/news/12-Febbraio-2018/23352/il-papa-sui-criminali-stranieri-sporcati-dai-commenti-la-realta-viene-travisata.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ ilpopulista_it. (2018, 6 February). “CIÒ CHE LA STAMPA DEM NON VUOLE DIRE Renzi: "Il caso Macerata porta voti alla Lega". E la stampa di Sinistra.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/960873282277867527; ilpopulista_it. (2018, 7 February). “LE CARTE SEGRETE DEI PM SU INNOCENT I due nigeriani hanno mutilato la 18enne in più punti, l'hanno dissanguata e...” [Twitter Post] Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/961170237461876736; ilpopulista_it. (2018, 8 February). “QUEL PD FUORI DAL TEMPO C'è uno strano fenomeno per cui ripetendo più volte una parola questa perde di” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/961522560570675200.

are tired.”¹⁰⁶ Coming from 5 February 2018, this nationalized familial connect predates that of *RaiNews* with Mastropietro’s uncle.

Compared to the mainstream far right – the actors from *LN* or *FdI* – *CPI* acted the most quickly to construct a hermetic narrative regarding the events in Macerata, focusing primarily on shifting the focus of Macerata from Traini to Pamela. On 4 February 2018, the day after the shooting, *Il Primato Nazionale*, the newspaper of *CPI*, already had discursively linked the shootings by Traini with the death of Mastropietro, stating that the “ministry of truth” had decided that the life of Mastropietro “counted less” than those wounded by Traini, being the first of the far right actors to make this claim.¹⁰⁷ Simone di Stefano, on the same day, called the journalists who asked him not to correlate the two events “pathetic” since Mastropietro was “butchered” by Nigerians and Traini “fired on” Nigerians.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly enough, this was di Stefano’s only personal direct reference to Macerata in this two-week period, with *CPI* as a party and *Il Primato Nazionale* continuing the narrative by repeating di Stefano in other media. Nonetheless, *CPI* did not excuse the “gesture of a deranged man,” in reference to Traini’s shooting spree.¹⁰⁹ However, *Il Primato Nazionale* even so tried to humanize Traini through presenting the “solitude of a vigilante” as being the trigger motivating the attacks.¹¹⁰ The rest of the tweets and stories published before 17 February 2018 stressed Mastropietro’s murder and violence resulting from leftist demonstrations in response to the shootings, much in the same vein as *LN*.¹¹¹ However, *Il Primato Nazionale* was able to infuse an explicitly racial tinge to their narrative at the end of the analysis period, publishing a story about a

¹⁰⁶ ilpopulista_it. (2018, 5 February). “++ IL PIÙ LETTO DI IERI ++ La mamma di Pamela: "No alla violenza, ma da italiana capisco... siamo stanchi!"” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ilpopulista_it/status/960786459153321984.

¹⁰⁷ IIPrimatoN. (2018, 4 February). “#Macerata, il ministero della Verità ha deciso: #PamelaMastropietro conta meno degli spari di #Traini” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/960079873174851589>.

¹⁰⁸ diStefanoTW. (2018, 8 February). “Una ragazzina squartata da un Nigeriano, fatta a pezzi, eviscerata come un pesce e buttata in un fosso a Macerata e un pazzo che a Macerata si mette a sparare sui Nigeriani. E i giornalisti mi chiedono di non mettere in correlazione i due eventi. Siete patetici.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/diStefanoTW/status/960069676473769984>.

¹⁰⁹ CasaPoundItalia. (2018, 3 February). ““Il gesto dello squilibrato che a Macerata ha aperto il fuoco sugli stranieri va condannato senza esitazioni, si tratta di un atto criminale per cui non ci sono giustificazioni”. La nota di Gianluca Iannone, presidente di CasaPound.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/CasaPoundItalia/status/959843034404933632>.

¹¹⁰ IIPrimatoN. (2018, 5 February). “#Macerata e il fallimento della politica. La solitudine del giustiziere” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IIPrimatoN/status/960440727938494464>.

¹¹¹ CasaPoundItalia. (2018, 11 February). “Simone Di Stefano sui fatti di Macerata e i cori choc sulle foibe.” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/CasaPoundItalia/status/962712415023575040>.

Nigerian cardinal stating that people should “get used to black Italians” in response to Macerata.¹¹²

The most engaged actor as a whole was *CPI*, which commented on the shootings and the murder the most consistently throughout the whole period while at the same time tying it to wider issues important to the party. *CPI* was also the first actor to bring in the murder of Mastropietro in relation to the shooting. After the shooting occurred on 3 February 2018, *FdI* began to reproduce this narrative tying it to Mastropietro on 4 February 2018 with it later being picked up by *LN* on 5 February 2018. However, between the mainstream far right parties of *LN* and *FdI*, Salvini was the first to comment on the shootings and to discursively link it to the issue of migration. *LN* and *CPI* both explicitly racialized the narrative and went in direct confrontation with the institutional Catholic Church. Nonetheless, the overall narrative of the far right on the totality of their social media regarding the events in Macerata followed a general pattern of identifying the shooting, condemning it, and then either diverting attention away from the attacks by focusing on the Mastropietro murder and the fact that Nigerian migrants had committed this murder.

As such, the narrative battle between *RaiNews* and the far right displays an interesting paradigm, one that somewhat paralleled that of the Rimini rape. *RaiNews* first presented an opening volley of discursively linking the shootings to the far right, but after this subsided, it refocused on the death of Pamela Mastropietro. In opposition, the far right denounced the shootings from the first moment, but then directly shifted the emphasis of the Macerata brand to both Mastropietro’s murder and violence resulting from leftist demonstrations. The directionality for this even came first from the extreme right of *CPI* by claiming that Pamela’s life counted less for the government on 4 February 2018, and then such a narrative spread to the rest of the far right by 5 February 2018. This narrative actually then became reproduced tentatively by *RaiNews* on 5 February 2018 as well by mentioning it in connection to Traini but then evolved to stand on its own by 6 February 2018. The events in Macerata show an interplay between what should represent the

¹¹² IlPrimatoN. (2018, 16 February). “Il cardinale #nigeriano sui fatti di #Macerata: “Abituatevi agli italiani neri”” [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/IlPrimatoN/status/964511423484317696>.

cultural hegemony picking up and reproducing what was originally the narrative of the counter hegemony of the extreme right that it condemned on the onset.

5.6 An Integrated Narrative Analysis

From the representative totality of these five events and the narratives, discourses, and counter narratives produced in each, a heuristic pattern on overall support and opposition, narrative and counter narrative from each actor can be drawn out and shown in a wider structure. This analysis comes mainly in the confluences and divergences between each actor, and how exactly the culturally hegemonic actors presented each event and how the far right reported on each event, discerning them as intertwined texts. First from this paradigm comes the presentation of the cultural hegemon's proxy in this research, *RaiNews*. *RaiNews*, in every single event, constructs either a depoliticized narrative of each event in the vein of the post-liberal, and if *RaiNews* does politicize any of the events – as in the case of FC Lazio Anne Frank scandal and the German Imperial flag scandal – this politicization comes from a view of these events acting as transgressions against the neoliberal substratum of the hegemony as a whole. Nonetheless, the far right presentations of these events display more of a depth of contestation, which is more telling for the purposes of this thesis.

Discerned as a semi-unitary actor, for every single one of the analyzed events, the institutional accounts of the far right of *LN* and *FdI* and of the parties' candidates for prime minister presented complementary and parallel narratives. For Macerata, they both focused on the Mastropietro murder – making it equal to immigration policies, only after a brief recognition of Traini's shooting spree. In the case of the Rimini rape, they both presented a similar narrative strategy – this rape would not have occurred if the state had not pursued such immigration policies. For the Milan Starbucks protests, *LN* and *FdI* both expressed the same general exasperation and sarcastic opposition to the restyling installation. For both the FC Lazio Anne Frank scandal and the German Imperial flag scandal, the party and personal accounts from *LN* and *FdI* remained completely silent – although not ignorant – of either event.

Nonetheless, *Il Populista* of *LN* – as a media source in its own right – constructed its own narratives in a fashion incredibly similar to the extreme right in the form of *Il Primato Nazionale*, which would link the electorally successful far right to the extreme right of

CPI. While in the case of the German Imperial flag scandal the party account of *LN* and Salvini's personal account provided no narrative construction, *Il Populista* presented a complementary discourse to that of *CPI*. *Il Populista*, in this fashion, operated as a bridging actor between *LN* and *FdI* and the extreme right of *CPI*. As Salvini acts as the co-editor of the news site, at least in name, this shows that therein exists a spectrality of narrative constructions within the far right itself.

This being said, *CPI* – representing the extreme or fringe of the far right – always responded to every single issues and in this way always presented a counter narrative in response to culturally hegemonic narrative characterized by the form of that of *RaiNews*. *Il Primato Nazionale* even provided linguistic justifications – “vigilantism” – for Traini's shooting spree in Macerata when the other actors of the far right would focus solely on the Mastropietro murder. As such, *CPI* can be viewed as an aberration in the case of the far right as a counter hegemony, with more extreme views and discourses, one that can be either ignored or operationalized by other more electorally successful actors, such as *LN*, in those situations wherein it proves useful to do so. Such an instance of this can be discerned as in the offer of support from *CPI*'s di Stefano to a *LN* government, to which Salvini responded “after the fifth [of March], I'll consider everything.”¹¹³ While for the elections, such an alliance with *CPI* was not considered by Salvini, the possibility of such a connection nonetheless existed.

Such a chasm between the far right of the election and the extreme right of the discourse displays that within the counter hegemony itself, there is present its own material hierarchy, such as that between the cultural hegemony and the counter hegemony in a societal totality. Even within the representative body of the counter hegemony, the cleavages between the constructions of each event shows that even what could be considered an overall counter hegemonic actor – in this case, the Italian far right – diverges in their own internal discourses and narratives, and form their own center (*LN*, *FdI*) and their own periphery (*CPI*). Whether or not this would constituted something akin to a cultural hegemony within the party family of the Italian far right is a question

¹¹³ La Repubblica. “CasaPound: “Pronti a sostenere un governo Salvini”. E il leader leghista risponde: “Dopo il 5 incontro tutti.”” 26 February 2018. http://www.repubblica.it/speciali/politica/elezioni2018/2018/02/26/news/casapound_governo_salvini-189827325/?refresh=ce.

for other research, but from these preliminary results of this thesis, the situation looks as such. Nonetheless, each presentation by *LN*, *FdI*, and *CPI* reinforced their identifications as far right actors, considering that every single narrative was constructed using a mixture of nativist, populist, and authoritarian elements.

Most importantly, the fact of the matter is that in every single event, the far right both had the opportunity and capitalized upon the discursive space afforded to them by social media in order to create an alternative – and sometimes counter – narrative to that which the cultural hegemony provided on its own. As the anarchic discursive space of the internet and digital media has therefore afforded a dual character to the sphere of media, which can now no longer be hermeneutic, enclosed, and censoring of aberrant narratives from that which is willed by the cultural hegemon, the entire idea of the cultural hegemon has been problematized.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Does the mere utterance of “Macerata” draw an association with Traini’s anti-migrant shooting rampage or Pamela’s brutal murder? Was the flag in the Florentine barracks a signification of Prussian military tradition or neo-Nazis in the police force? From the discursive results of this study, the answer to both questions is simple and resounding affirmation. Since the realm of social media in the proxy of Twitter offered equal discursive space to both the culturally hegemonic and counter hegemonic actors, culturally hegemonic narratives and discourses coexist with the counter hegemonic ones even if they represent the other’s antithesis.

From all of the results, can the hypothesis of the research question find a suitable answer, and does online media affect the ability of counter hegemony challenge to hegemonic control? The working hypothesis to this question has been answered in the affirmative, as within each of these events the far right has created its own narrative that in each case provided an alternative or counter narrative. Even with such events such as the FC Lazio Anne Frank scandal and German Imperial flag scandal not garnering a response from some institutional actors of the far right, at least one representative party – namely *CPI* in every case – provided an alternative or counter narrative in response to that which was put forward by *RaiNews*.

The findings of this thesis, consequentially, have broad implications for the fundamentals of the theory of cultural hegemony in the first place. Since the media – due primarily to the proliferation of digital and social media – has now been afforded with a dual, hybrid character, this would make the entire structure of cultural hegemony a hybrid in itself, as two of its three constituent structural institutions for the manufacture of consent have a hybrid character in its own right – media. It follows from this logic of hybridity – or perhaps in this case, chimerism might more fittingly describe the actual paradigm – that cultural hegemony and its counter hegemony cannot be viewed as distinct, separated subjects. The anarchic conditions within social media and digital do not grant what would have previously been a centrality of the cultural hegemony to its counter hegemony periphery, and due to this state of affairs, both are presented in the sphere of social media on the same level for their discourses, regardless of basis on fact, morality, ethics, or any overarching truth. Social and online media has allowed the far right to be its own gatekeeper in terms of discourse, free of any hegemonic censorship, to use the “gatekeeper” description of media from Gamson and Wolfsfeld. In this digital sphere, the cultural hegemony and the counter hegemony are still interconnected and interdependent as they still utilize the same referent objects, but at the same time, they are nonetheless afforded the exact same opportunities for narrative construction, and both wider groups are able to engage with each other or ignore each other as willed.

6.1 Limitations

The main limitation of this study is in its focus on Italy as the subject of analysis. The social conditions, historicity of its political actors and domestic symbolic connotations, and its placement within wider global structures and institutions forces the results of this study to find its applicability only to the case of Italy. The reason for this selection, initially, was to test the Gramscian understanding of cultural hegemony in a contemporary context on Gramsci’s original subject for his theory. However, the results nonetheless warrant further research, applying the same methodology and theoretical testing of narrative research to other historical periods, other states, and other institutional actors in order to see if such phenomena could be universally instead of locally applicable.

While not as much a limitation as a word of caution, social and online media – while important and illustrative of many ongoing processes that would have remained hidden otherwise – are nonetheless just one integral piece of a much larger mosaic of mechanisms

affecting these contemporary transformations in the conceptualization of hegemony. As with the limitation in the focus on Italy, these findings on the role of social and online media need to be integrated into wider interpretations in other research to test their validity in terms of universality and impact outside of simply the proof that social media affords a space of contestation.

6.2 Final Words

Even with such limitations taken into account, this research on the relationship between the cultural hegemony and the counter hegemony in the sphere of online media has shown that the actual situation is far more complex than a simple dichotomy between the two, if the two can even be considered unitary actors at this point. Social media, whether or not it has caused this bifurcation, has nonetheless rendered it possible to discern such a branching outward. Hypothetically, in a democratic society such as Italy, both the discourses of the cultural hegemony and the counter hegemony could be accessed by anyone, providing a choice in narrative, a selection in which discourse would be more suitable to an individual. The mere existence of this choice contests the consent produced by the cultural hegemony in the first place.

The former consent production has shifted to a consent contestation, which while this situation does not inherently deny the possibility of the reproduction of the values and discourses of the cultural hegemony, it provides for the possibility for the individual to deny such discourses and values due to a mechanism within the structure of cultural hegemony itself, *i.e.*, media. Future studies on cultural hegemony and any periphery societal actors, such as the far right, must consider such enveloping circumstances going forward, or at least as long as social media remains in its current stead, *ceteris paribus*.

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8. Annex: Digital Resources

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