



UWL REPOSITORY

repository.uwl.ac.uk

"We are against Islam!" The Lega Nord and the Islamic folk devil

Testa, Alberto ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9116-9802> and Armstrong, Gary (2012) "We are against Islam!" The Lega Nord and the Islamic folk devil. *Sage Open*, 2 (4). pp. 1-14. ISSN 2158-2440

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2158244012467023>

This is the Published Version of the final output.

UWL repository link: <https://repository.uwl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1034/>

Alternative formats: If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact: open.research@uwl.ac.uk

Copyright: Creative Commons: Attribution 3.0

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy: If you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact us at open.research@uwl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

“We Are Against Islam!”: The Lega Nord and the Islamic Folk Devil

SAGE Open
October-December 2012: 1–14
© The Author(s) 2012
DOI: 10.1177/2158244012467023
<http://sgo.sagepub.com>


Alberto Testa¹ and Gary Armstrong¹

Abstract

Since 1995, the Italian Lega Nord (LN) political party has depicted itself as the defender of *Padania*, a territory that covers the mainly affluent regions of Northern Italy. Around this politico-spatial territory, the LN has shaped an identity based on the notion of *Popolo Padano* (the Padanian People). Since the new millennium, LN rhetoric has increasingly focused—stemming more from the demands of realpolitik than those of conviction—on opposing irregular immigration per se and, more specifically, Islam and Muslim immigration. In the eyes of the LN propagandists and their media, the theology of Islam and its practitioners represent a growing threat to the modern Italian and Padanian identity (and tradition). The LN has not been alone in using the media to oppose Islam; the Italian media has reinforced LN messages; Muslims are generally depicted as dangerous and compared with terrorists and their religion and culture are described as the opposite of Italian/West values. Something approximating to a “moral panic” around this issue has ensued. Integral to this are notions of morality combined with practices of moral entrepreneurship. What follows seeks to highlight the LN’s stereotypical depictions of Islam. This evaluation is important because the LN was a major player in former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s government (2008–2011) and is still a significant party among the Italian political spectrum. Integral to what follows are the following questions: “Is contemporary Islamic immigration a threat to the Italian (and Padanian) way of life?” and “Are the perceived threats to be found in the periodic uncertainties that societies suffer or might we need to search for wider processes?”

Keywords

Italy, Lega Nord, Islam, immigration, moral panic, folk devil

We are against Islam! This is a great battle of civilisation for the Lega Nord! We cannot allow Islam to colonise us!

—Alessandro Savoi
(Lega Nord, in dirittodicronaca.com, 2010)

Natives and the Swamp

My voice is deliberately raised and undiplomatic because “we” Padani refuse to be involved with the cunning Roman swamp (a derogatory reference to the centre of Italian politics describing the inability of national politics to address issues) that does not see that as everything dies, “we” [Padani] seek change (Umberto Bossi—leader of the Lega Nord [LN]).¹

Islam and its stereotypical representation are at the forefront of a variety of global anxieties (Allen, 2010; Esposito & Kalin, 2011; Fekete, 2009; Gottschalk, 2007; Sayid & Abdoolkarim, 2011), many of which have attracted those with Far-Right sympathies (Cheles, Ferguson, & Vaughan, 1995; Davies, 2002; Ellinas, 2010; Price, 2008). That said, the fears and panics engendered by Islam in many Western

political circles are hardly novel, they go back as far as the era of the Crusades, and stereotypical discourses on Muslims preceded the September 11th, 2001, Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in New York and the July 7th, 2005, attack on the London transport network (Wellington, 2009). Since these latter episodes, however, “Islam” and “Muslims” have become, with the help of the media, inextricably linked with terrorism and political fanaticism (Poole, 2006). The discourses of fear surrounding Islam find fertile ground in contemporary Italy for two reasons. First, Italy has been politically, bureaucratically, psychologically, and culturally unequipped to tackle the social impacts of mass immigration (Mignone & Coppa, 1995). The Roman Catholic organization Caritas (Caritas Migrantes, 2011) estimates that today some 4 million immigrants reside in Italy, 1,500,000 of which are Muslims. Of these Muslims, 500,000 are Italian citizens. More than 250 Muslim places of worship now exist in Italy (Ruppi, 2010). Second, Italy is the quintessential

¹Brunel University, Uxbridge, UK

Corresponding Author:

Alberto Testa, Brunel Centre for Sport Health and Wellbeing, Brunel University, UB8 3PH, UK
Email: a.testa@brunel.ac.uk

“liquid society” (Bauman, 1998, 2000). Such a society is characterized by the absence of strong institutions, an overwhelming fear of unemployment and general uncertainty about the future. Bauman’s assertion about the inability of the liquid State to be the “certainty producer” definitely holds in the case of Italy where a political class seems incapable of addressing—among many pressing issues—the North–South divide, which forever fractures the country’s economy and psyche. In the eyes of many, Italy is a “sick” country affected by constant fear (Morici, 2010). Prominent among these fears are those relating to Islamic terrorism and Muslim immigration. In this framework, Muslims have become the perfect representative of Bauman’s “underclass”; this demographic is perceived as a threat to social order by an increasingly fearful indigenous public who are subject to perpetual economic insecurities. In this milieu, new political movements have emerged.

This article attempts to analyze the LN’s construction of Islam using the concept of the moral panic (Cohen, 1972; Ben-Yehuda & Goode, 1994). Drawing on data expounded variously on Youtube, Facebook, the LN’s main websites (LegaNord.org; studentipadani.com; giovanipadani.leganord.org; associazionipadane.leganord.org), the webvideo channel *TelePadania*, the official LN radio channel *RadioPadania*, the party’s official newspaper *La Padania*, and the online newspaper *Il Padano*, the authors seek to examine the rationale behind the strategy of the LN, which is a significant player in Italian politics. In seeking to ascertain the reality surrounding the perceived threats represented by contemporary immigrations to an ancient way of life, the article seeks to locate the true *Padania* origin and locate the perceived threats within the periodic uncertainties that societies suffer—threats which contribute to the debate about moral panic.

Methodological Notes

This article has followed a constructionist paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Constructionists take language analysis seriously, conceiving it as a tool to create reality. This vision is crucial when a researcher wants to evaluate how language strengthens ethnic identity. This article attempts to emphasize the contraposition of two “versions” of ethnicity that the LN promotes; namely, the *Padania* people (Us) and the Muslims (the others).

The Internet—a crucial “storehouse” of readily available and up-to-date information (Sade-Beck, 2004)—was considered an appropriate medium to collect the data to highlight the Moral Panic—inducing discourses of the LN relating to Islam.

To evaluate the data, discourse analysis was utilized. Blanche and Durrheim (1999) define discourse analysis (DA) as “the act of showing how certain discourses are deployed to achieve particular effects in specific contexts” (p. 154).

Van Dijk (2000 in McGregor, 2010) acknowledges that DA does not have a unitary theoretical framework or methodology because it is best viewed as a shared perspective encompassing a range of approaches. However, three factors should be highlighted when DA is performed: the discourse in the text, how the effect is achieved in a text, and the context in which the text functions.

The first action is to distance oneself from the text and to identify binary oppositions (good–bad; true–false); recurrent themes, phrases, and metaphors; the subjects of the texts; and the author and the listener. The second, to be executed simultaneously, is to understand the effect of the discourse: What do the texts do? For instance, do they promote a particular ideology or motivate readers to act in a specific way? These aims can be explicit, implicit, or both (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In seeking answers, the researcher needs to explicate the broader context within which texts operate (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In performing the analysis, this study has strictly followed the warranting criteria identified by Wood and Kroger (2000), namely, “Trustworthiness”—delivered by the clarity and orderliness in which the study was conducted, recorded, and reported and qualified by an audit—and “soundness”—which accounts for exceptions and alternatives and makes sure that analyses is plausible and persuasive.

Analysts choose certain texts and decide how to delimit these texts and how to analyze them to achieve certain effects (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The analyst must thus “try to extract him/herself from living in culture, [but] to reflect on culture” (Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p.101). This is the aim in what follows.

La Lega and the Electorate

Popularly referred to as *Lega*, the *Lega Nord per l’Indipendenza della Padania* (the Northern League for the Independence of Padania) is the largest party in the Veneto region of Northern Italy and the second biggest in the Lombardy region. Famous for its slogan “*Roma ladrona*” (Rome is a big thief), the party appealed to many Italians disillusioned with the political class that brought the 1980s political crisis, ever-remembered as *Tangentopoli* (Barbaceto, Gomez, & Travaglio, 2002). The first appearance of the LN occurred in 1979 when small autonomist groups (*leghe*) emerged with the aim of giving areas (*regioni*) of the northern Italian regions autonomy from the Italian capital, Rome. For such people, the political class located in Rome did not serve their interests. In 1989, the *Lega Nord* movement was constituted and included other *leghe* such as the *Lega Lombarda*, *Alleanza Toscana*, *Union Ligure*, *Lega Emiliano-Romagnola*, *il Piedmont Autonomista*, and *la Liga Veneta*.

Politically and ideologically, the LN has proven ephemeral. It had—and still has—a populist appeal but does

not correspond to any Right-Left-Centre orientation. Pro-Catholic, socially conservative, and Eurosceptic, its leader Umberto Bossi once described the party he led as “libertarian and socialist.” Secessionist in origin, the LN settled for pursuing federalism in later years. The Lega had electoral success and has placed its elected members in high office. The 1992 general election saw the LN win the fourth highest number of votes (StoriaXXIsecolo.it, 2010). The following year, a league candidate was elected as Mayor of Milan. The 1994 general election saw the Northern League attract 8.3% of the vote, a figure that rose to 10.6% 2 years later.² Plagued by splits, by 2001, the figure was down to 3.9%. In the 2008 general election, the LN ran as a partner in the Movement for Autonomy and polled 8.3% (La Repubblica, 2008). Four of its politicians received ministerial posts in the “axis of the North” government of Silvio Berlusconi; the LN leader Umberto Bossi held the office of Minister of Federal Reform. In the European Council election, the LN’s proportion of the vote rose from 8.1% in 1989 to 10.2% at the 2009 election, a figure which afforded nine Members of the European Parliament (MEP). Other groups sharing the ideology of the LN are highly active at local level in Padania, notably the *Donna Padana* (Women of Padania movement), the *Movimento Studentesco Padano* (Padania Students Movement), and the *Movimento Giovani Padani* (Padania Youth Movement).

The political nature of the LN is hotly debated, notably regarding whether or not it should be classified as an extreme right party or a populist movement (Albertazzi, 2006). Considered influential in the country’s movements in preventing the arrival of sea-borne illegal immigrants, the LN has a somewhat chequered record on the issue of migration and has the stigma of being anti-immigrant and xenophobic. In 2003, Bossi suggested that Italian authorities open fire on the boats carrying such migrants (La Repubblica, 2003). In-depth and recent sociopolitical/historical accounts of the LN are available in the works of De Matteo (2011), Biorcio (1997, 2010), Peruzzi and Paciucci (2011), and Pandolfi (2011). Without a doubt, the LN displays the traits typical of a populist political actor, led as it is by the charismatic Umberto Bossi. As Der Brug and Mughan (2007) argue, the charismatic leader “is obeyed not by virtue of a custom or a law, but by virtue of the faith he inspires” (p. 31). The main determinant of the successful charismatic leader is his or her perceived personal and exceptional merits (Charlot, 1971). Bossi is perceived by his electorate as an outsider, forever fighting the political battles taking place in Rome. Bossi portrays the LN as the only tool to fight the corrupt “professional Roman politician,” and implicitly, cultural and “ethnic” pride. His words strike at the heart of many Italians; Bossi appeals to millions of voters, many of whom see themselves as the bulwark of what it is to be both “Padani” and “Christian.” To understand the LN construction of the Muslim Folk Devils which will be highlighted later in this

article, it is also important to consider the specificity of the LN among the Italian centre-right political panorama.

The other major party on the Italian centre-right is the *Popolo della Libertà* (PdL), formerly led by Silvio Berlusconi. The PdL, together with the LN, formed Italy’s government from May 2008 to November 2011. Although the two parties can both be classified as populist, they have their own specificity and differences; the LN’s populism is embedded in a loathing for the Italian politics and a strategy of harnessing Padanian consensus; this form of populism also has an ethnic component which links populism to the LN’s nativist sentiments (Ruzza & Schmidtke, 1993). It is these sentiments that frame perceptions of those entering Italy from without.

The journeys made by immigrants to Italy are frequently hazardous and sometimes end in death at sea in the case of those leaving Africa. Seeking a better lifestyle than that provided by their indigenous states, the hundreds of thousands who arrive on the shores of Italy are in many cases in transit and see the peninsula as a stepping stone to the perceived greater potential of Northern Europe or the eventual nirvana that is the United States. They move inspired by a wish to join the “winning” side. In pursuit of this, they suffer exploitation and poverty and run the risk of being the recipients of violence from the host people who do not appreciate their presence nor want to hear of their plight. As “aliens”—be it long term or short term—they provoke fear; their presence is perceived as polluting. They are not People Like Us, and in the eyes of those who would demonize them most they will—consciously or unconsciously—undermine an established way of life. A crucial dimension in this state of affairs was identified by anthropologist Hans Lucht (2012) whose ethnographic study of Ghanaian migrants to Italy’s southern shores examined the reaction they evoked and argued that the issue of reciprocity between the newly arrived and the indigenous was crucial. For Lucht, channels of reciprocity were empowering, manifesting a commitment to share which provides for a degree of trust. Such a model is idealized; immigrants vary widely in their need or desire to reciprocate. As Lucht (2011) argues, when economic circumstances for the native-born are poor, the newly arrived face questions as to what use they are for the host society? They can soon become unwanted. When stories abound about their morality, they become Folk Devils; people become moralistic. At some stage this can cause a panic.

The LN’s ethno-populism is conducive to just such panic. It is motivated by the need to engineer consensus by creating and sustaining a feeling of otherness. The dynamic is simple; it sets the *Padania* people against outsiders; the stronger the message, the more successful is the appeal to the people, as it creates a strong sense of collective identity. As mentioned earlier, this populist and nativist ideology is different from that expressed by its ally, PdL. The latter has a political component made up by socialist, Christian democrats and

liberals, which has depended on the charisma of its former leader Silvio Berlusconi for a measure of its political success. All of Berlusconi's political proclamations express a form of populism which is not territorial or ethnical, but based on antipolitical and antiparty messages (Ruzza & Fella, 2011) and the pride of being Italian, hence the name of the party that he founded *Forza Italia* (Go Italy); this populism is more confined to his favored mode of communication and its appeal to the vices and virtues of every Italian.

The LN can also be considered a nativist movement (Hague, Giordano, & Sebesta, 2005). Nativism originated in 19th-century United States as a reaction to growing European immigration (Betz & Meret, 2009). The core issue of nativism concerns the assimilability of diverse peoples in a multicultural society, specifically the extent to which the "outsiders" are culturally (and religiously) compatible with the majority indigenous population and the likelihood of them being absorbed into the latter.

Nativists are advocates of an identity based on the idea that the basic order by which people (us) live is better than how "the others" live (Taylor, 2006). Nativism can thus be interpreted as a "cultural defence" against those who challenge social cohesion (Betz & Meret, 2009). The nativism expressed by the LN has been present since the origin of the party in the perceived clash of civilizations between the "people of the nord," represented by the LN, and the lazy and corrupt southerners; however, the tragic happenings of the 9/11 2001 shifted this political discourse and focused more and more on Muslims. Schmidt di Friedberg argued that

After September 11, the generalised prejudice against Muslims increased, often reacting, within institutions, in an indirect and legalistic way. For example, in the Bergamo area (Lombardy) some Muslim prayer rooms were closed on the ground (very likely perfectly true) that some safety requirements were not respected. Islamophobia displayed itself fully during the year 2000 for reasons that have less to do with the behaviour of Muslims in Italy than with Italian internal social and political balances.³

Samuel Huntington (1997) claimed contentiously that civilizations have a natural inclination to clash and that religion is a crucial element in identifying a civilization. The LN subscribe to a similar mind-set. For its members and sympathizers, social interaction does not accustom social groups to "others" but instead underlines the differences between such groups. Although in catholic Italy the LN has been a central protagonist in this differentiation process, it has not acted alone; well-known journalists and writers such as Oriana Fallaci have highlighted the clash of civilization between Islam and Italy, favoring the construction of the Muslim Folk Devil.

In a 2005 interview with the Wall Street Journal, Oriana Fallaci stated that

Europe is no longer Europe . . . It is "Eurabia," a colony of Islam, where the Islamic invasion does not proceed only in a physical sense, but also in a mental and cultural sense. Servility to the invaders has poisoned democracy, with obvious consequences for the freedom of thought, and for the concept itself of liberty. (The New York Times, 2006)

This resentment "infected" many Italians and promoted the LN's objective of finding yet another scapegoat to use as a stimulus to reinforce the Padania identity (Ignazi, 2005). In what follows, the authors describe how the LN represents the Muslims of Italian society as a threat to the cohesion of both Italy and Padania. As a consequence, the LN has been intransigent in debates surrounding immigration, and have conducted "crusades" against the opening of mosques and the promotion of cultural practices linked to Islam. A sense of panic is evident here, as is moral entrepreneurship. But what, we need ask, is it that needs protecting?

The Padanian Nation: Transitions and Virtues

The LN *Padania* identifies itself with the wealthy regions in the North of Italy, namely, Liguria, Piedmont, Lombardy, Valle d'Aosta, Trentino Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, and Marche. However, the very notion of Padania is controversial. Recently, Gianfranco Fini, the President of the Italian House of Representatives—the second most important political figure after the President of the republic—declared that "Padania is simply a fortunate lexical invention for propaganda" (La Repubblica, 2010). The LN's response was immediate; the influential LN exponent Roberto Calderoli—then a minister in Berlusconi's government—argued that to deny the identity of *Padania* was like arguing that the Earth was flat (Fiammeri, 2010). Such debates will not go away. Meanwhile, the LN has had to sustain itself.

Since its origin, the LN has needed to construct an "ethnic" identity for the northern regions of Italy that promotes a sense of self. This strategy relies on its promotion of a sense of "difference" and detachment from the rest of the country. This was needed to achieve its political target of separating from the body politic of Italy using the political strategies of either secession or federalism, depending on political expedience. A new society based on a strong Padanian identity is envisaged and sought by the LN proponents. This "new" society would be based around shared symbols, rituals, and most importantly, language. Symbols—such as *il sole delle Alpi* (the sun of the Alps)—is crucial to the LN's strategy, symbolizing, as it does, the Celtic Rose which represents the assumed common Celtic ethnic heritage of the Padania populations (Oneto, 1997, p. 6). This Celtic heritage aims to bring Padania closer to the populations of northern Europe and to provide "an additional ethnic explanation to its

previously articulated relation between regional identity and an entrepreneurial culture” (Huyseune, 2010, p. 228).

Traditions have also been invented to assist the LN in the pursuit of its aims (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). For instance, one of the LN’s main public displays is the March 25th gathering at Pontida, begun in 1990.⁴ This, now annual, gathering celebrates the 1167 Oath of Pontida which promoted the constitution of the Lombard League (LL), an entity founded to oppose the Emperor Federico Barbarossa. The LN discourses centre on Alberto da Giussano, the legendary leader of the LL, who led a coalition of towns from the Lombardia region in armed conflict against Barbarossa. The 1176 Battle of Legnano symbolized the victory of the northern people against the central hegemonic power of the emperor. This victory has become a metaphorical weapon to be deployed against the politics of the centralist Roman-Italian state.

In shaping its sense of ethnic identity, the LN concomitantly identifies a series of virtues assumed to be common to the *Padani* and expounded in a document of the Youth *Padana* Manifesto⁵ which states,

The Young Padani live by the history, tradition and culture of their ancestors and their land. The value of loyalty to their peers, inner honesty, brotherhood, consistency in their objectives, constant work, integrity are all moral values that distinguish the mass from the Young Padano . . . From time immemorial we live, work, protect and love these lands, handed down by our ancestors crossed by the waters of our great rivers. La Padania is our pride, our greatest resource and our only chance to freely express ourselves respecting our individual traits and collective feeling . . . We, the Peoples of Padania solemnly proclaim: La Padania an independent and sovereign Federal Republic. In support of this cause we offer ourselves, a mutual pledge, our lives, our fortunes and our honor.

The term *Padania* is obsessively repeated in the above Manifesto as is the case in any political action presided over by the LN; this strategy states unequivocally—and repeatedly—the existence of this “imaginary” territory and ethnic group. Values such as the ethic of work, combined with honesty, integrity, and social cohesion, are stressed within the traditions of Christianity.

This has political and moral consequences for some groups. Via language and discourses of fear, the LN has created an external threat to their people. These threats are needed to unite the *Padania* people. *La Padania* is, hence, considered here as a version of existence created via discourse and reinforced via constant discourses comprising representations and “social practice” (Domanski, 2003). A sense of “Moral Panic” ensues. But what constitutes a moral panic?

The Moral Panic: Structures and Agents

At root the moral panic is about instilling fear in people and, in so doing, encouraging them to try to turn away from the complexity and the visible social problems of everyday life and either to retreat into a “fortress mentality”—a feeling of hopelessness, political powerlessness and paralysis—or to adopt a gung-ho “something must be done about it” attitude. (McRobbie, 1994, p. 199)

The concept of moral panic is mostly associated with the academic discipline of criminology and the work of Stan Cohen (1972) and Jock Young (1971). According to the former,

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (Cohen, 2002, p. 1)

Crucial to any explanation of Moral Panic are definitions of outsider groups presented in a stylized and stereotypical manner. These groups are defined or perceived as a threat to the wider societal values and interests, and opinions about them are voiced by the socially accredited experts (Cohen, 1972). Such panics occur in the arguments of Cohen (1972) when society is unsure of itself or is in the process of relocating its boundaries. In such scenarios, the moral panic dramatizes the issue at stake. At times, there may well be behaviors that test existing societal boundaries. At other times, the behavior now censured was always evident but is now less tolerated. Power is thus crucial to any analysis; some groups who lack it are vulnerable to attacks and stereotyping. Crucially, in the words of Cohen, “The manipulation of appropriate symbols—the process which sustains moral panics, campaigns and crusades—is made much easier when the object of attack is both highly visible and structurally weak.” Specific social phenomena are constructed to produce generalized and exaggerated public anxiety.⁶

Moral panics are thus to be considered social constructions characterized by a disproportionate reaction to a perceived danger. Crucial to such processes are media and political representations. Generally, the social issues which are the focus of this social construction have existed in some

different form in the past and are represented by politicians and others as “new” or subject to an increase in magnitude. The consequent impact on society is often exaggerated with “unfounded” statistics voiced to incite a political reaction. A variety of moralizing agents are at the origin of these social phenomena. These agents have an interest in perpetuating the anxiety (Jenkins, 1996).

We should, however, not forget the full title of Cohen (1972), that is, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. The Folk Devil might best be understood as a socially constructed Ideal Type identified as a threat. This was not particularly elaborated on by Cohen, but we suggest that the work of Becker (1963) can be drawn upon in considering how the label is inseparable from the symbol and, furthermore, how this duality enters public consciousness. As Al-Natour (2010) acknowledges, the various panics highlight a constant revival of the leading actor of the panic, namely, the Folk Devil which, as Ben-Yehuda and Goode (1994) detail, is the personification of evil. The construction of the moral panic seeks to strengthen the dominance of the established value system at a time of perceived social crisis (Donson, Chesters, Welsh, & Tickle, 2004).

The political dimensions of the Moral Panic can be implicit or explicit and have in the eyes of some aficionados of the paradigm related to the orchestration of consent. This sees the media and judiciary assume the role of *vox populi* and thus, in the case of the media, can claim to speak on behalf of the general public, while the latter can claim to act on the strength of public opinion (Downes & Rock, 1988). More explicit political analysis was evident in the analysis of Hall, Clarke, Critcher, Jefferson, and Roberts (1978) who saw in the response of the media and judiciary to the phenomenon of “mugging” a crisis of hegemony in the capitalist system of the United Kingdom which left a divided and embittered society. The ensuing “war” on crime perpetuated by alien (i.e., non-White, Caribbean-born immigrants) saw the rise of the “law and order” society as the political system sought to reassert itself and manufacture consent using cross-class fears of crime perpetrated by “different” people.

The term *moral panic* is a contested one, being applied to the perception and reaction of many diverse phenomena. Many of these applications issue from a preoccupation with media content and ignorance of the sophisticated schema that Cohen (1972) drew up. With its origins in disaster research theory (Baker & Chapman, 1962), Cohen’s paradigm was constituted by a nine-event schema. These events could be categorized into three blocks; the first inventory, which he called “media,” consisted of

1. Exaggeration and distortion
2. Prediction
3. Symbolization

In this time, those exposed to the issue assess the event and its effect. Then came the phases known as Reaction (Part 1), which focuses on opinions and attitudes, and

Reaction (Part 2). In the former, the stages of Orientation, Images, and Causation were evident and in the latter, which might best be termed *the rescue and remedy phase*, the features were Sensitization, Societal Control, and Exploitative Culture. According to Cohen (1972), all nine elements need to be present for an event to be defined as a moral panic. Interestingly, Cohen introduced the notion of entrepreneurs in articulating the idea of the moral panic but did not elaborate bar noting the decline of the lower-middle class. The role of the moral crusader is not one that Cohen developed.

Moral crusades have a long history (Bristow, 1977). The work of Jenkins (1992) combines the notion of moral panic with explanations around the constructs of moral entrepreneurs, symbolic crusades, and social problem theories and presents their origins and causation. Those behind the crusade can be individuals, interested agencies, or those tasked with law enforcement (Thompson, 1994). Crucial to his analysis is the question regarding how an issue becomes a problem. This requires our knowing who the people are that raise matters to the status of a problem, and on top of this we must be aware of the resources available to such people to publicize and sustain the issue. Ultimately, we should address the nature of the “ownership” of the matter. This has implications in social theory, notably around the notions of social anxiety and interest groups and is thus pertinent to Durkheimian and Marxist theory. The latter was evident in the debates around “mugging” (see above); the former would argue that the Folk Devils so crucial to the moral panic debate assist in the reassertion of the established value system at times of perceived solicitude (Thompson, 1994).

Other theorists have attempted to conflate a host of paradigms that correspond to these concerns. In Ben-Yehuda and Goode’s (1994) text titled *Moral Panics*, the authors compress Cohen’s nine elements into the following five components:

1. Concern: levied toward the behavior of a previously labeled category,
2. Hostility: which should accompany the above,
3. Consensus: widespread acceptance of the problem is needed,
4. Disproportionality: a subjective quality but necessary for inducing fear, and
5. Volatility: moral panics can erupt at any time.

Four criteria are then introduced to constitute the panic: deviance, social problem, collective behavior, and social reaction. They then introduce three models of moral panic:

1. *Grass-Roots*: based primarily in spontaneous public concern sometimes triggered by an incident,
2. *Elite-Engineered*: when fear is begun intentionally to nurture concern and fear, and
3. *Interest-Group*: when individuals—rule creators and moral entrepreneurs—launch crusades that occasionally turn into panics.

Crucially, the *Elite-Level* model does not fit Cohen's theory and is more about moral crusading. The *Interest-Group* model similarly does not fit the Cohen moral panic model; moral panics are not the same as moral crusades. The latter requires an entrepreneur to intervene in seeking to save society from "threat" they have identified (Becker, 1963).

Analysts of "Moral Panic" cannot ignore the media. Words and images are integral to the entrepreneur getting his or her message across and in providing him or her with a "hierarchy of the credible" according to which their attitudes and opinions are promoted. However, crucially this promotion occurs after the initial reporting and disturbance. The threat that the entrepreneur expounds may have existed for a long time and may not be considered problematic. Other variables enter the field to confuse our analysis. Hostility toward the Folk Devil can be small and/or muted, and then suddenly be amplified. Consequently, the crucial quality of the entrepreneur/crusader he or she is never easy to pin down. Any argument about "Moral Panic" is thus impressionistic and somewhat speculative. Moral outrage, however, has its appeal; addressing the roots of a social problem is laborious and sometimes too revealing of societal imbalances and injustices. It usually requires a number of interventions. In such scenarios, stereotypical depictions and fears are easier to deal with. There may well be electoral advantage in the demonization of those who do not have the same avenues of response.

Depictions and Discourses of Islam

The Islamic communities located in the Padania territories increasingly seek to impose unacceptable behavior in our schools to our students such as the removal of crucifixes from the classrooms, the disappearance of the traditional Christmas Crib, the gender separation of classes rooms, the absolute prohibition of certain foods such as ham in the food canteens, and the introduction of the chador (and the Burqa), this is a dangerous road towards the erasure of the most basic civil rights, against the Italian Constitution which all the "Roman" parties [Italian political parties which do not care about the interest of Padania] they pretend to be the legit defenders . . . The Lega Nord with this document will put a stop to the spread of this progressive decay of values and symbols that distinguish our identity [Padanian identity].⁷

From the words presented above, it is possible to identify what Van Dijk (2006) terms *the ideological square*, namely, the contemporary, positive, self-representation of an in-group (in this instance, the LN and the Padanian people) against the negative, other-presentation of the out-group (in this instance, Muslims). Belief systems are crucial to this duality. The people of *Padania* and the LN present themselves as representative of the last defenders of Italian and

European Christianity and its symbol of the crucifix. The LN article depicts Islam as the main source of the contemporary disappearance of the Christian symbol from Padanian public places. This same symbol is considered a tool of unity and belonging for the *Padano*. Muslims are "immigrants" which, instead of complaining should thank the people of Padania that they are able to live in Padania. The tone is one of anger, taking offence at the possibility that another religion can be offended by the symbols of another belief system. It questions why a guest should seek to insult the host, but it does not express panic. Crucially, the article was written in 2002 a few months after the Al-Qaeda attack on the World Trade Center. Anger is expressed in subtle ways against the forces that should be active. A 2009 editorial of the *La Padania* newspaper in 2009, titled "Another Lepanto to Stop Islam," argued

Today the Church is afraid. It does not fight. The church is pacifist at any cost. You cannot make peace with those who do not want to! On the contrary, as the Latins said, *si vis pacem para bellum*: sometimes the war—metaphorical or otherwise—is necessary just to achieve peace . . . theirs not a Pope like Pope Pius V, someone or something is missing capable of creating a strong coalition between the forces of Christianity. And who would be the glue? The fortress is today the LN, we are the barrier. But it is not enough: "What is needed is strong and widespread reaction in Europe. Because the enemy is coming, indeed has infiltrated into our society, it corrodes our society from the inside while at the same time attack from the outside." I wish there still existed the "priest-soldier Templars." What do we need to do? The LN know that Islam is on the march, while we are just watching. We Need a new Lepanto, otherwise they [Muslims] will occupy the entire West . . . the supporters of the centre-right coalition are warned from today the LN becomes the "Holy League." (Macchi, 2009, p. 1)

In this article, the Muslims (as a collective) are depicted as the oppressors of the (equally collective) *il Popolo Padano*. The latter is encouraged to resist them to avoid jeopardizing their freedom and way of life. The text exemplifies topicalization (Huckin, 2002). Words are carefully chosen to sustain a "perspective" that influences the target audience, namely, the people of *Padania*. The LN link with "us" reinforces group identity and presents the LN as a voice with a legitimate grievance.

The LN seems in this text to want to incite violence to stop Islam. The editorial not only identifies the LN and *Padani* as the new 21st-century Knights Templars but also refers to the October 7th 1571 Lepanto battle celebrated every year by the LN militants. On October 7th 2010 the LN of the Region Marche conducted a religious service, depositing a laurel wreath into the Adriatic Sea (off Lepanto) which contained the message "Defending Christianity to the

Death.” The deposition was accompanied by a speech from the LN regional leader, Enzo Marangoni, who recalled the 16th-century battle stating, “The Christian army lost 15 ships with 7,650 men, 7,780 were injured. 15,000 Christians were freed from the Turks.”⁸ Marangoni also used this occasion to declare the wish of the LN to promote a regional law to commemorate the battle annually adding, “remember this event that has marked the history of Europe . . . Remember where *we* came from and commemorate those who lost their lives to get *us* where we are today is an imperative duty of the present and future generations.” History and heroism are invoked to celebrate Us against Them. Regret is voiced about the absence of the religious warrior prepared to die for the cause. The enemy is identifiable and is at the gate of civilization. Something has to be done.

An important element of the LN construction of Islam is the clear distinction they seek to portray of the superior (Christian-Padania) self and the evil (Islamic) Other. Islam is not only portrayed as a monolith but as a belief system synonymous with acts of terrorism (mainly against Christians), and a theocracy intent on undermining one of the most important values of the “true” *Padano*: the nuclear and extended family. The Muslim Folk Devil will go to great lengths to right that considered wrong and is thus both deviant and a danger to many innocent people. Even a painting can provoke the Muslim Folk devil to violence.

In June 2009, the online LN newspaper, *Il Padano*, wrote an article titled “The Muslims Want Us Dead” (*Il Padano*, 2009a). On the same page was a picture of Giovanni da Modena’s iconic 15th-century painting, *Muhammad in Hell*. The fresco depicts a scene from Dante’s *Inferno* which sees the prophet Muhammad being devoured by demons as he enters Hell. In recent times, Islamic militants have claimed that the image is an insult to Muslims. Two attempts to destroy the image and the structure it exists in have been thwarted by the Italian police. In 2002, five Muslim men linked to Al-Qaeda were arrested as they plotted to blow up the church. In 2006, another plan to destroy the building was discovered by the Italian police. The words published alongside the image address the recent arrests of suspected Muslim terrorists in Italy. The author argues the following:

1. RISKS OF MASSACRES AT BOLOGNA AND MILAN. Once again, we have been almost near [to be hit], a terrorist Muslim group, operating since 2003, had already planned bloody attacks in Milan and Bologna in respect of [the prophet] Muhammad. Now the butchers of the Jihad, five North African arrested for terrorism, are all safely in jail; four were already in jail abroad, while the fifth was arrested in the [immigration] detention center of Caltanissetta [Sicilian city].

2. NEUTRALISED. With these arrests the Muslim structure to which other north Africans—already arrested—belonged is practically neutralized . . . The

Carabinieri General Giampaolo Ganzer can be legitimately happy: “Once again—he said—the combined investigative-judicial system of prevention and repression has worked.” The high rank police officer confirmed that the group was a “concrete threat” and that the targets selected would have caused horrendous massacres.

3. MUHAMMAD IN HELL. The Islamic terrorists targeted the Milan underground and the Muhammad in hell painting. Targeted by Islamic terrorists was in fact the Milan subway and the Basilica of St Petronio in Bologna which hosts the famous painting of Muhammad in Hell.

4. BUTCHER’S SHOP. The LN MEP Mario Borghezio stated about this news: “The Maghreb terrorists were ready to implement the usual butcher’s shop Islamic attacks in Milan and Bologna: once again this proves that the alert launched by us [Lega Nord Padania] is true and real. What will the forever anti Lega Nord say [now] about us, [about the LN] who opposes the proliferation of mosques and fundamentalist Islamic centers where foreign Imams preach—using the Arab language—to hate us, our religion and our civilisation. (*Il Padano*, 2009a)

The use of double meanings and the striking imagery of the painting get the reader’s attention. The Muhammad in Hell image, used by *Il Padano*, suggests—very subtly we might surmise—what the Padani and the Lega Nord Padania (LNP) would like to see. If the writer had wished to avoid such insinuations, he could have toned down the headline. Terms such as *butcher’s shop* and *want us dead* connect the mosque to terrorism and suggest that Muslims hate “Us” [*La Padania*] and “our” civilization. And what should be done? One paragraph congratulates the political efficiency of the state but at the same time highlights the contributions of the LN to this struggle. The LN—a reader is led to believe—is politically responsible for the success of the police raids. At the time of writing, the Minister of the Interior (the man in charge of the Italian national security) was Roberto Maroni, a LN politician second to only Umberto Bossi in terms of seniority.

For the LN, a “moderate” Islam is not conceivable. The fear of both colonization and cultural invasion diffused by Islam among *il Popolo Padano* is well explained, reiterated, and added to a new fear evident in the popular LN banner titled “NO. Let’s stop the Islam invasion.” The banner, which displays the national flag of Turkey, summarizes the position of the LN regarding Turkey’s efforts to join the European Union (EU). In the following speech recorded from the LN Radio’s *Padania Libera* Channel the party’s concerns about the prospect of Turkey becoming a member of EU are expounded by the LNP MP Alberto Torazzi.⁹

In the [Italian] parliament every political party agree—except the LN—to allow Turkey to become member of the EU. Turkey is a country of 85 million Muslims with 40 million under the age of 25; in Germany—an influential country—they have done a survey to understand how things will go, 20 million Turks under the age of 25 want to emigrate to other European countries. If these people emigrate, it will be a catastrophe for Italy. Some 3–4 millions of these people will need our welfare state without considering all the mess that is linked with dealing with a Muslim country [Turkey]. Against this horrible catastrophe that is about to hit Europe; the only party that strongly opposes is the LNP. I invite all the citizens, who have voted Berlusconi, to vote for the LNP to give a warning to Berlusconi who needs to change his mind and be in line with the French President Sarkozy.

The cultural and religious demonization of Muslims is amplified to benefit the LN. As Maneri (2001) states, immigration is the favorite object of global moral panic discourses. Fear surrounding immigration is pertinent for political parties such as the LN because of the enormous potential for boosting political consensus that a fear of the cultural “Other” provides. In the Italian context, such a strategy is to a large degree free of risk; the Muslim is an historical alien and is excludable—legally, socially, and symbolically—from the “moral” Christian community of the northern Italian regions. But the issue is more than theological, and at times fear relating to the murderous potential of a terrorist attack is second to the assumed loss of beauty and virtue that Islam is believed to endorse.

According to the LN, the most important values of the *Padani* are *la Chiesa* and *la famiglia* (the religion and the family).¹⁰ Using the institution of the family, and specifically marriage, the “moral entrepreneur” induces discourses of moral panic around Islam to warn of the “danger” of mixed marriages, their failure, and the concomitant loss of freedom for *Padania* women that conversion to Islam would entail.

Addressing marriages between Christians and Muslims, the newspaper *Il Padano*, in its article titled “Drama and Failures, Marriages With Muslims Are True Funerals” (2009), argues,

Mixed marriages with the Muslims are increasingly at risk. Even without mentioning recent cases [which are] in the [media] attention (the Moroccan arrested on charges of killing his partner and daughter, after the baptism of the child occurred in his absence, or the Egyptian who killed the son of 10 years for revenge against the woman who left him) the unions between Padanian women and immigrant Muslims have disastrous results. Indeed, the constant failure of the marriages with the Muslims bring down the average “success” of mixed marriages. That is certainly tragic,



Figure 1. We love women without veil

almost nine unions between Padanians and foreigners are bound to fail soon.

Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, when he was the archbishop of Bologna, argued strongly to discourage marriages with the Muslims. His appeal, quite evidently, is still valid (Il Padano, 2009b).

A billboard (see Figure 1)¹¹ used by the LN regional candidate of the LN Jari Colla at the Lombardia regional election of 2010—and subsequently promoted by the *Movimento Studentesco Padano* (Padania students’ movement)—reinforces these differences.

The billboard depicts two Muslim women covered head-to-toe in long dresses and head veils that reveal only the eyes. The picture on the right represents two blonde-haired young girls in their late teens wearing ordinary jeans and T-shirts, smiling and hugging each other. Their clothing does not hide their femininity, albeit they are not sexualized. To a Western eye, they portray freedom and possibly optimism; the Islamic women suggest a life of submission. The two pictures contrast the supposedly limitless potential of the *Padania* girls with the restrictions on freedom to which their Muslim counterparts are subject.

The billboard seems carefully structured to produce a sense of oppression and to promote a negative judgment of the Muslim way of life. This binary opposition seeks to underline the incompatibility of the two cultural models but it is also a warning for all women who embrace mixed marriages to be careful of the mortification of their femininity and the humiliation they will inevitably experience in the name of Islam.

Conclusion

I do not believe in a moderate Islam. In the rest of the world, Christians are killed by the followers of Allah
—Mario Canossa (LN, cited by Cravero, 2011)

According to Cohen (2005), the moral panic is produced by the interaction of several actors: the media, the agents of social control, the political class, and the actions of influential groups. Does what has been presented here thus constitute a Moral Panic? Let's look at the evidence. The LN's astute use of its media outlets permits it to label minority groups and incite moral debate and outrage. Via constant repetitions, these versions of reality are presented or identified as the truth and used to interpret reality (Domanski, 2003). The LN claims to influence the media and the agents of social control. Both the police personnel and the Minister they answer to assume the important role of being seen to tackle the immediate danger represented by "Them." Perceptions of the immediate danger are accentuated by the arrest of potential Muslim terrorists, ably assisted, it would seem, by politicians mobilizing the people and proposing emergency laws to fight the Muslim threat. Meanwhile, other legislation is proposed to outlaw that which is not a physical danger but a danger to the everyday norm, notably the *burqa* as worn by some Muslim women.¹² The opening of mosques is opposed—for the LN, the beliefs promoted within are the antithesis of the civilized Judea-Christian world.¹³ Legislation has subsequently entered the statute books with the aim of promoting the commemoration of "Us" via ceremonies that celebrate the victory over both centralist (domestic) interests and expansionist Islam. Common stereotypes that encourage ethnic antagonism are promoted. Media articles focus their attention on the imminent danger of the Islamic invasion, in the actual number of immigrants and the potential danger represented by the arrival of others should Turkey attain EU status. For further emotional response, the LN use Christianity and the symbol of the family as something integral to northern regional traditions. Via its various moral panic-inducing discourses, the LN seeks to build a shared imaginary based on notion of domestic security while legitimizing its subtle, neo-racist ideology (Back & Solomos, 2000).

Identity is as much about exclusion as it is about inclusion; the critical factor is the *social* boundary which defines the group with respect to other groups over and above the cultural reality within those borders (Erjavec, 2003). As such, the moral panic is a tool used to reinforce the imaginary identity of the *Popolo Padano* (and promote the success of the LN political strategy to detach the northern regions of Italy from the rest). This is evident in the mutual support proffered by the actors and entrepreneurs of the moral panic: the LN media, the LN itself, and particularly its senior politicians. The various groups connected politically to the LN, together with the external support of forces of social control, help to shape the borders of the *Padania* community. Those who fight the Muslim threat are portrayed as the (Christian) Knights of Goodness. They utilize the rhetoric that sets the moral panic against a target (an enemy in fact) that is relatively powerless politically; they thus confirm the theory. The Muslim community in northern Italy is consistently

discriminated against as Ezzeddin Elzir, the President of the Union of the Islamic Community in Italy, explained in an official letter sent in September 2010 to the Italian President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano (StranieriinItalia.it, 2010).

Behind these anti-Islam discourses lies not only an effort to represent the imaginary nation of Padania but also the very survival of the LN. Its political strategy depends heavily on ad hoc enemies. The discourse around Padanian security in the face of Islamic migration is crucial to this dynamic. Fear-led discourses based on the belief of an immediate danger and constant emergency make the sense of being and defending Padania important. Images and words assist in the construction of boundaries. But the idea of Padania is a fantasy. The moral panic helps sustain the fantasy. The LN's anti-Muslim discourse which fuels Moral Panic has been reinforced by the so-called Arab Spring; the LN's political exponents spoke several times against regime-change in Tunisia and Libya. Lorenzo Fontana—a LN MEP and member of the European parliament foreign commission—renamed the Arab spring the "Islam spring," highlighting the danger of these changes in regime. In an interview titled "Islamic Wave" he stated,

Before everyone else I was able to report that the Arab spring could lead to the replacement of undemocratic regimes with extreme Islamist-inspired movements, even if there were statements stressing the moderation of the new movements; I think objectively difficult for new governments supported by these movements to achieve a genuine democratic change in their countries. (Fontana, 2011)

This story is a product of moral panic and moral crusade. Anthropology can assist our analysis. The tome "Race and History" written by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was an attempt to discredit the biological notions of "race" which animated Hitlerism (his insights were part of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's [UNESCO] 1952 Statement on Race). He argued that anthropology committed a momentous error in confusing the idea of race, in the purely biological sense, with the sociological and psychological productions of human civilizations. This honest intellectual mistake led to the "unintentional justification of all forms of discrimination and exploitation" (Levi-Strauss, 1952, p. 5). We can see this confusion in perceptions of Islam and Islamic civilization, where the products of specific historical and sociological circumstances are lazily reduced to so-called biological propensities. When Levi-Strauss spoke of the contributions of different races of men to civilization, he accounted for them by geography, history, and sociology, not "by special aptitudes inherent in the anatomical or physiological make-up of the black, yellow or white man" (Levi-Strauss, 1952, p. 6). He also argued that cultures had collaborated throughout history. Propelling this process of collaboration were two

conflicting currents: one tending toward unification, the other toward the maintenance or restoration of diversity:

As a result of the position of each period or culture in the system, as a result of the way it is facing, each thinks that only one of these two currents represents an advance, while the other appears to be the negation of the first. But we should be purblind if we said, as we might be tempted to do, that humanity is constantly unmaking what it makes. For, in different spheres and at different levels, both currents are in truth two aspects of the same process. (Levi-Strauss, 1952, p. 49)

Again, we can see this tension in the dynamic between minority Muslim populations and representatives of “indigenous” culture. Here members of the “dominant” culture and the Muslim community are conflicted over the degree to which assimilation and accommodation should occur.

We can, however, present a wider picture which locates the structure of the moral panic within the agency that is the lived reality of the Italian body politic. Clearly, an outsider group is stereotyped and presented as a threat to established societal values. In these processes is evident the symbolism, distortion, and exaggeration that Cohen (1972) would recognize. Causation—granted not very analytical—is offered by the LN analysts as are images of the Folk Devil. The implementation of new laws suggests that the societal control element of Cohen’s model fits the reality in this case. But we can step back here and question the notion of boundaries in a society that is prone to political turmoil, evidences ancient and still vociferous regional antagonisms, and just 25 years ago witnessed citizens massacring fellow citizens in the cause of political ideologies of the left and right.¹⁴ The same society has the most number of statutes of any nation in a legal system that is best described as both labyrinthine and Byzantine.

The Islamic migrants may—both innocently and at times deliberately—test the boundaries of religious tolerance and may be a visible reminder of the global processes that have affected Italy. But the newly arrived do not seek to overthrow the state or change the political system. Some—the moderates we assume, their numbers unknown—seek to remove the symbol of Christianity from places where they meet and teach in. The fanatics seek to destroy that which offends them. Alongside a moral panic is a concomitant moral crusade which fits the socially conservative and pro-Catholic demographic of the LN. Raising the status of the Muslim threat, the protagonists of the LN are acting in character; theirs is a party that in origin coalesced around causes and responds well to slogans and fears surrounding the migrant. In such matters, the LN is happy to claim ownership. In the schema of Ben-Yehuda and Goode (1994), the LN manage to raise concern and hostility, but this is achieved via its own media which should not be equated with any notion of state response or “state control.” Actually, when

the LN was leading the country under former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the position of the Italian government regarding Islam was not consistent or homogeneous. Although there were at times declarations against a nonidentified Islamic extremist, the PdL was different from the LN in its pronouncements on Islam; this was mainly due to the political nature of the PdL, being a combination of different political components—socialist, Christian democratic and conservative. Its position is thereby moderated and rejects the LN’s homogeneous ideology. In this regard, it is important to stress that in 2005, under PM Silvio Berlusconi and the Home Office leadership of the PdL senator Giorgio Pisanu (a former Christian democrat), the *Consulta per l’Islam Italiano* (the Committee for the Italian Islam) was instituted for the first time in Italy. Pisanu’s Committee was composed of defenders of Italian Muslims and was tasked with advising the minister of home office in his attempts to improve the social integration of the Italian Muslims. In 2010, under the LN leadership of the Home Office, this Committee was replaced by a less representative body.

The LN is the ideological apparatus of a region and, more specifically, of those who have failed to attract more than 10% of the national electorate. The panic that the LN seeks to inspire is in part Elite-Engineered and draws upon Grass-Roots antipathy to the recent migrations of a variety of people to the Italian mainland. The LN Interest-Group has members in high offices of government and claims it can influence policy. The Folk Devil thus exists in the sense of panic and the imagination of the crusader. The construction of moral panics, together with the construction of otherness, is crucial in the LN’s attempt to build—and sustain—its sense of shared identity. The promotion of otherness is based not so much on objective differences but on the discourses that a social group or individual constructs to stigmatize another group, underlining perceived faults while devaluing them and making them prone to discrimination. This also serves to strengthen the Self by promoting a feeling of superiority (Staszak, 2008).

The Folk Devil is the fanatical male Islamic terrorist who seeks to avenge the Christian place of worship that depicts the prophet being insulted, challenges the sanctity of *la Famiglia* and, if left to his own devices, would conceal the *bella figura* that is so integral to the Italian concept of femininity. But this Folk Devil is hard to find and seemingly requires the intervention of the specialist squads of the Italian state security system. This may not be a comfort because the devil—as Catholics well versed in the concept of Evil know—is ephemeral but everywhere, waiting to tempt and strike.

Presumably only a vote for the LN can save the region (and maybe the nation) from a destiny decided by the fanatics of Islam. A Faustian pact might thus be sought by some, which would be in keeping with the coalitions that typify Italian politics.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. See Facebook page Lega Nord sez. di Castelli Calepio <http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=75995895681>
2. See <http://www.radicalifvg.it/Risultati.html>
3. See <http://inhouse.lau.edu.lb/bima/papers/Ottavia.pdf>
4. The Pontida gathering in 2010 can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1V7TtekgU>
5. http://mgpbassabresciana.leganord.org/loghi/CARTADEI VAL-ORI_MGP2.pdf
6. Any analysis that fits the category of Moral Panic has to realize that it is a paradigm that has been utilized to explain a variety of phenomena. A single-loop regenerative feedback pertinent to deviance amplification (see Wilkins, 1964) was derived from cybernetics (see Maruyama, 1963). It has applicability to 17th-century religious persecution in Puritan New England (Erikson, 1966) constructs around mental illness (Scheff, 1966), the creation of misbehaviors around youth subcultures in an English seaside town (Cohen, 1972), social reactions to drug takers in West London (Young, 1971), the construct of crime waves in the bureaucracy of English policing (Ditton, 1979), and as an explanation as to the appearance of “Mugging” in Birmingham in the mid-1970s (Hall et al., 1978), as an explanation as to the sequences behind the Inner City riots that spread throughout England in the summer of 1981 (Lea & Young, 1982), and to explain the general application of the term *Hooligan* in over a century of English crime reports (Pearson, 1983).
7. Document retrieved from http://www.padaniaoffice.org/pdf/mozioni/mozione_crocifisso.pdf (Milan, November 6, 2009)
8. See www.vivereancona.it/index.php?page=articolo&articolo_id=264517
9. Member of the European Parliament Alberto Torazzi. Radio Padania Libera 29-05-2009
10. See <http://leganord.org/elezioni/2008/lega/famiglia/Famiglia.pdf>
11. See <http://jaricolla.com/senza-categoria/perche-a-noi-le-donne/>
12. In 2010, the Lega Nord (LN) has presented a law proposal to forbid the burqa to make a common front with President Sarkozy's France that implemented such a ban in 2010. See http://iltempo.it/2010/09/18/1201369-francesco_alfani_testa_europa_francia_messo_parte_berretto_frigio_coccarda_rossa_bianca_rivoluzionari_indossato_elmetto_della_polizia_mettere_ordine_caos_multiculturale_delle_banlieue_approv.shtml
13. We refer to the latest (2011) LN initiative to block the construction of a proposed Mosque in Turin, Italy's third largest city. The plan to stop the project via judicial appeal to the

Regional Administrative Tribunal (TAR), was instigated by the local MP Stefano Allasia who argued, “We are concerned that Torino will become another Alexandria (Egypt),” a reference to the 2010 New Year's Eve massacre that occurred in Egypt that saw bombs placed outside the church of the minority Christian Coptic resulting in 21 deaths. The perpetrators were believed to be Muslim extremists. See http://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/01/03/news/torino_dice_si_alla_moschea_e_ora_scontro_con_la_lega-10797528/

14. We are referring to *Gli anni di Piombo* (The Years of Lead) a period of terrorism for Italy; during the 1970s and 1980s left and right-wing militants clashed on the streets of the country. See Galli (1986).

References

- Albertazzi, D. (2006). Back to our roots' or self-confessed manipulation? The uses of the past in the Lega Nord's positing of Padania. *National Identities*, 8, 21-39.
- Allen, C. (2010). *Islamophobia*. Hants, UK: Ashgate.
- Al-Natour, J. (2010). Folk devils and the proposed Islamic school in Camden. *Continuum*, 24, 573-585.
- Back, L., & Solomos, J. (2000). *Theories of race and racism*. London, England: Routledge.
- Baker, G. W., & Chapman, D. W. (1962). *Man and society in disaster*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Barbaceto, G., Gomez, P., & Travaglio, M. (2002). *Mani Pulite la veria storia (Clean Hands: The true story)*. Roma: Editori Riuniti.
- Bauman, Z. (1998). *Work, consumerism and the new poor*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Becker, H. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York, NY: Macmillian.
- Ben-Yehuda, N., & Goode, E. (1994). *Moral panics: The social construction of deviance*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Berger, L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. London, England: Anchor.
- Betz, H., & Meret, S. (2009). Revisiting Lepanto: The political mobilization against Islam in contemporary Western Europe. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 43, 313-334.
- Biorcio, R. (1997). *La Padania promessa. la storia, le idee e la logica d'azione della Lega Nord (La Padania promessa. the history, the ideas and the logic of action of the Northern League)*. Milano, Italy: Saggiatore.
- Biorcio, R. (2010). *La Rivincita del Nord (The Revenge of the North)*. Rome, Italy: Laterza.
- Blanche, T., & Durrheim, K. (1999). *Research in practice*. Cape Town, South Africa: University of Cape Town.
- Bristow, E. (1977). *Vice and vigilance*. London, England: Gill and Macmillian.
- Caritas Migrantes. (2009). *Dossier statistico immigrazione Caritas-Migrantes (Immigration Statistical Dossier)*. Retrieved from http://www.caritasitaliana.it/materiali/Pubblicazioni/libri_2009/dossier_immigrazione2009/scheda.pdf

- Charlot, J. (1971). *The Gaullist phenomenon*. London, England: Allen & Unwin.
- Cheles, L., Ferguson, R., & Vaughan, M. (1995). *The far right in Western and Eastern Europe*. London, England: Longman.
- Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the Mods and the rockers*. London, England: MacGibbon and Kee.
- Cohen, S. (2005). *Folk devils and moral panics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cravero, F. (2011). Torino dice sì alla moschea e ora e' scontro con la Lega. *La Repubblica (Turin said yes to the Mosque and now it 'clashes with the Lega Nord)*. Retrieved from http://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/01/03/news/torino_dice_si_alla_moschea_e_ora_scontro_con_la_lega-10797528/
- Davies, P. (2002). *The Routledge companion to fascism and the far right*. London, England: Routledge.
- De Matteo, L. (2011). *L'idiota in politica (The idiot in politics)*. Milano, Italy: Feltrinelli.
- Der Brug, W., & Mughan, A. (2007). Charisma, leader effects and support for right-wing populist parties. *Party Politics*, 13, 29-51.
- Dirittodicronaca.com. (2010). *La Lega e la battaglia contro l'Islam (The Lega Nord and the battle against Islam)*. Retrieved from <http://www.dirittodicronaca.com/2010/01/09/la-lega-e-la-battaglia-contro-lislam/>
- Ditton, J. (1979). *Controlology: Beyond the new criminology*. Oxford, UK: Macmillan.
- Domanski, M. (2003). The construction of social reality in minority discourse: Polish immigrants in Montreal (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Département d'anthropologie, Faculté des arts et des sciences, Université de Montréal . Canada: Université de Montréal.
- Donson, F., Chesters, G., Welsh, I., & Tickle, A. (2004). Rebels with a cause, folk devils without a panic: Press jingoism, policing tactics and anti-capitalist protest in London and Prague. *Internet Journal of Criminology*. Retrieved from <http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com/>
- Downes, D., & Rock, P. (1988). *Understanding deviance: A guide to the sociology of crime and rule breaking*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon.
- Ellinas, A. (2010). *The media and the far right in Western Europe: Playing the nationalist card*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Erikson, K. (1966). *Wayward puritans: A study in the sociology of deviance*. New York, NY: John Wiley.
- Erjavec, K. (2003). Media construction of identity through moral panics: Discourses of immigration in Slovenia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 29, 83-101.
- Esposito, J., & Kalin, I. (2011). *Islamophobia: The challenge of pluralism in the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Fekete, L. (2009). *A suitable enemy: Racism, migration and Islamophobia in Europe*. London, England: Pluto.
- Lucht, H. (2011). *Darkness Before Daybreak: African Migrants Living on the Margins in Southern Italy Today*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fiammeri, B. (2010). *Fini: Non c'è l'identità Padana. Il Sole24ore (Fini: The Padania identity does not exist)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2010-10-10/fini-identita-padana-080309.shtml?uuid=AYsVZaYC>
- Fontana, L. (2011). *Onda islamica in Tunisia, Libia ed Egitto (Islamic wave in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya)*. Retrieved from <http://sezioneugozuanetti.leganord.org/component/content/article/722-onda-islamica-in-tunisia-libia-ed-egitto-fontana-attacca-qoccidente-sordo-alle-conseguenze-della-primavera-arabaq.html>
- Galli, G. (1986). *Il partito armato - gli "anni di piombo" in Italia, 1968-1986 (The armed party - the "bullets years" in Italy, 1968-1986)*. Milano, Italy: Rizzoli.
- Gottschalk, D. (2007). *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the enemy*. London, England: Rowan & Littlefield.
- Hague, E., Giordano, B., & Sebesta, E. (2005). Whiteness, multiculturalism and nationalist appropriation of Celtic culture: The case of the League of the South and the Lega Nord. *Cultural Geographies*, 12, 151-173.
- Hall, S., Clarke, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., & Roberts, B. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state and law and order*. London, England: MacMillan.
- Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Huckin, T. N. (2002). *Critical Discourse Analysis and the Discourse of Condescension*. Retrieved from www.writing.ucsb.edu/wrconf08/Pdf_Articles/Huckin_Article.pdf
- Huntington, S. P. (1997). *The clash of civilizations: Remaking of world order*. New York, NY: Touchstone Book.
- Huyseune, M. (2010). Defending national identity and interests: The Lega Nord's asymmetric model of globalisation. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 10, 221-233.
- Ignazi, P. (2005). Legitimation and evolution on the Italian right wing: Social and ideological repositioning of Alleanza Nazionale and the Lega Nord. *South European Society and Politics*, 10, 333-349.
- Il Padano. (2009a). *Drammi e fallimenti, matrimoni con gli islamici veri funerali (Franceschini gossips, Muslims want us dead)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ilpadano.com/padano.php?newsID=1569>
- Il Padano. (2009b). *Franceschini spettegola, i Musulmani ci vogliono morti (Tragedies and failures, weddings with Muslims are real funerals)*. Retrieved from <http://www.ilpadano.com/padano.php?newsID=1831>
- Jenkins, P. (1992). *Intimate enemies: Moral panics in contemporary Britain*. New York, NY: Walter De Gruyter.
- Jenkins, P. (1996). *Pedophiles and priests: Anatomy of a contemporary crisis*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- La Repubblica. (2003). *La marina non usera' la forza contro gli immigrati [The (Italian) Navy will not use force against the immigrants]*. La Repubblica. Retrieved from <http://www.repubblica.it/online/cronaca/sbarcoquattro/martino/martino.html>
- La Repubblica. (2008). *Speciale elezioni 2008 (Special Issue on the 2008 elections)*. La Repubblica. Retrieved from <http://www.repubblica.it/speciale/2008/elezioni/camera/>
- La Repubblica. (2010). *La Padania non esiste (La Padania does not exist)*. La Repubblica. Retrieved from <http://www.corriere>

- .it/politica/10_giugno_21/fini-lega-padania_8f7a20a4-7d50-11df-b32f-00144f02aabe.shtml
- Lea, J., & Young, J. (1982, August). Race and crime. *Marxism Today*, 38-39.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1952). *Race and history: The race question in modern science*. London, England: UNESCO Press.
- Lucht, H. (2012). *Darkness before daybreak: African migrants living on the margins in Southern Italy today*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Macchi, E. (2009) Un'altra Lepanto per fermare l'Islam (An 'other Lepanto to stop Islam). *La Padania*, p. 1.
- Maneri, M. (2001). Il panico morale come dispositivo di trasformazione dell'insicurezza (The moral panic as a tool to transform insecurity). *Rassegna Italiana Di Sociologia*, 42(1), 5-40.
- Maruyama, M. (1963). The second cybernetics: Deviation-amplifying mutual causal processes. *American Scientist*, 51, 164-179.
- McGregor, S. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis—A primer*. Retrieved from <http://www.kon.org/archives/forum/15-1/mcgregorcd.html>
- McRobbie, A. (1994). *Post-modernism and popular culture*. London, England: Routledge.
- Mignone, M., & Coppa, F. (1995). *Italy today*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Morici, M. (2010). Le paure degli italiani del 2010. *Panorama*. Retrieved from <http://blog.panorama.it/italia/2010/01/13/le-paure-degli-italiani-del-2010-disoccupazione-al-primo-posto/>
- The New York Times. (2006). *Oriana Fallaci, Incisive Italian Journalist, is Dead at 77*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/16/books/16fallaci.html?pagewanted=print>
- Oneto, G. (1997). *L'invenzione della Padania (The invention of Padania)*. Ceresola, Switzerland: Foedus Editore
- Pandolfi, L. (2011). *Lega Nord. Un Paradossio italiano in 5 punti e mezzo (The Lega Nord. An Italian Paradox in 5 and a half points)*. Reggio Calabria, Italy: Laruffa.
- Pearson, G. (1983). *Hooligan: A history of respectable fears*. London, England: Macmillan.
- Peruzzi, W., & Paciucci, G. (2011). *Svastica Verde. Il Lato Oscuro del Và Pensiero Leghista (Green swastika. The dark side of the Lega Nord)*. Roma, Italy: Editori Riuniti.
- Poole, E. (2006). The effect of September 11 and the war in Iraq on British newspaper coverage. In J. R. E. Poole (Ed.), *Muslims and the news media* (pp. 89-102). London, England: I. B. Taurus.
- Price, N. (2008). The resurgence of the Far Right in European politics: An analysis of the French, Italian, Austrian and Belgian cases. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Publishing.
- Ruppi, S. (2010). I Musulmani di Puglia hanno diritto ad avere una moschea [The Muslims of Puglia have the right to build a Mosque]. *La Gazzetta Del Mezzogiorno*, Retrieved from <http://lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/notizia.php?IDNotizia=368712>
- Ruzza, C., & Fella, S. (2011). Populism and the Italian Right. *Acta Politica*, 46, 158-179.
- Ruzza, C., & Schmidtke, O. (1993). Roots of success of the Lega Lombarda: Mobilization dynamics and the media. *West European Politics*, 16, 1-23.
- Sade-Beck, L. (2004). Internet ethnography: Online and offline. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(2), 45-51.
- Sayid, S., & Abdoolkarim, V. (2011). *Thinking through Islamophobia: Global perspectives*. London, England: C Hurst & Co.
- Scheff, T. J. (1966). *Being mentally ill: A sociological theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Staszak, J. (2008). Other/otherness. In N. Thrift and R. Kitchin (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of Human Science (Online)*. London, England: Elsevier. Retrieved from http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&ved=0CDEQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.unige.ch%2Fses%2Fgeo%2Fcollaborateurs%2FpublicationsJFS%2FOtherOtherness.pdf&ei=KDuSUP7SJlyShgemsoD4CA&usg=AFQjCNHrW2Tfl_jD_gwSB4nUKSpZtQtgNw&sig2=sDVRo44m1yHTP5CHzFSDhg
- Storiaxisecolo.it. *Tangentopoli*. Retrieved from <http://storiaxisecolo.it/larepubblica/repubblica8c.htm>
- StranieriinItalia.it. (2010). *Ucoii: "Al nord Musulmani discriminati" (UCOII: "In the north Muslims are discriminated against)*. Retrieved from http://stranieriinitalia.it/attualita-ucoii_al_nord_musulmani_discriminati_11689.html
- Taylor, C. (2006). Religious mobilizations. *Public Culture*, 18, 281-300.
- Thompson, W. (1994). *Soft core. Moral crusades against pornography in Britain and America*. London, England: Cassell.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2000). *Critical discourse analysis*. Retrieved from www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Critical%20discourse%20analysis.pdf
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & Society*, 17, 359-383.
- Wellington, F. (2009). Racial profiling and moral panic: Operation thread and the Al-Qaeda sleeper cell that never was. *Global Media Journal*, 2(2), 25-40.
- Wilkins, L. T. (1964). *Social deviance*. London, England: Tavistock.
- Wood, L., & Kroger, R. (2000). *Doing discourse analysis*. London, England: SAGE.
- Young, J. (1971). *The drugtakers: The social history of drug use*. London, England: Paladin.

Bios

Alberto Testa is an applied sociologist who has published widely on the socio-political and cultural characteristics of contemporary Italy. He is a researcher of the Moral Panic Research Network at Brunel University, London.

Gary Armstrong is a currently a Reader in Sociology at Brunel University, London. Armstrong taught criminology for 10 years at the University of Westminster and Reading University in the UK and co-authored and co-edited two books examining CCTV and surveillance.