



UNIVERSIDADE  
CATÓLICA  
PORTUGUESA

**WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CULTURAL  
INSTITUTIONS GIVEN ITALY'S EMERGING  
POPULISM? THE CASE OF FONDAZIONE  
GIANGIACOMO FELTRINELLI**

Report submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a  
Master's Degree in Culture Studies: Management of the Arts and Culture

by

Isabella Sabatini

Universidade Católica Portuguesa: Faculty of Human Sciences

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Under the guidance of Professor Luísa Santos

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## **Acknowledgments**

Notwithstanding the stress caused by the analysis of my country's dystopian political situation, where some politicians believe there should be an Italian song every 3 on the radio, I am grateful for having attempted to reconstruct the "cultural puzzle" that has led us this far. I thank my supervisor Luisa Santos for her support throughout the year. I am also thankful to Fondazione's Head of Research, Francesco Grandi, for his serendipitous teachings.

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## List of Acronyms

- **AICI**: Associazione Istituti di Cultura Italiani
- **CGIL**: Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro
- **DHI**: Dignitatis Humanae Institute
- **EU**: European Union
- **ICT**: Information and Communications Technology
- **LGBTIQ**: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
- **M5S**: Movimento Cinque Stelle
- **NGO**: Non-Governmental Organisation
- **OECD**: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
- **PCI**: Partito Comunista Italiano
- **PD**: Partito Democratico
- **PdL**: Partito della Libertà
- **PPI**: Partito Popolare Italiano
- **TINA**: There is no Alternative
- **UKIP**: United Kingdom Independence Party
- **UN**: United Nations

## **Abstract**

The current report refers to an internship experience in Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milan, taken place between September 2018 and January 2019. The question “what is the role of cultural institutions given Italy’s emerging populism?” framed the research period. This paper’s aim is to address the numerous approaches employed by cultural institutions in the current political Italian landscape, shaped by populism.

Populism is described as the people wills’ impersonation (Müller, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Urbinati et al., 2018; Moffit, 2016). Specifically, the “populist moment” is characterized by an ideology with an antagonistic nature: the “corrupt elite” against the “pure people” (Mouffe, 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). The once dominant neoliberal model has been fervently challenged since 2008’s financial crisis; global populist movements indistinctly question capitalism’s contradictions. Neoliberalism’s failure is located within the “crises of knowledge”, where all traditional knowledge producers are experiencing a loss of authority (Grossber, 2017). Italy’s Lega-Five Star populist coalition exemplifies this frame, given the anti-science and anti-immigration sentiments it propagates. Intellectuals’ are in privileged positions of opportunity, which yield responsibility (Chomsky, 1967). Cultural institutions’ promise is to provide an epistemological “culture of enquiry” to all citizens (Carr, 2003). The methodology adopted in this report, besides the hands-on experience of the internship, is primarily lecture and library-based, hence includes secondary sources. After the “state-of-the-art” overview, Fondazione Feltrinelli’s scope is considered together with its predominant dialogue capabilities, analysis and countering of populism, through educational and historical approaches. Finally, this report includes a comparative analysis between Feltrinelli and Fondazione Basso, Istituto Sturzo and Istituto Dignitatis Humanae’s functioning. With the exception of the latter, whose peculiarity is Bannon’s endorsement, this research concludes that Italy’s cultural institutions typically act counter-hegemonically to populism and strive for change through reflection.

**Key Words:** *Populism; Crises of Knowledge; Responsibility; Educational Role and Fondazione Feltrinelli.*

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## Chapter 1: *Introduction*

A personal concern for Italy's political climate and a fruitful work experience motivated this internship report, which hopes to function as a testament to liberal intellectuals while investigating: what is the role of cultural institutions given Italy's emerging populism? We have currently entered an "age of anger" (Mishra, 2017). Italians now celebrate *Vaffa Day* (F\*\*k you Day), launched by the founder of the populist Five Star Movement Beppe Grillo (M5S). Populism's interpretation is multifaceted, as is its global appearance. It is linked to politicians' voicing of the people – a "volontè generalè" claim - and to the dichotomous ideology of the "corrupt elite" against the "pure people" (Müller, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Urbinati et al., 2018; Moffit, 2016; Mouffe 2018). Populism is anti-pluralistic as its leaders' Messianic presupposed representation of the people implies a homogenous society, and their competitors' exclusion from the "pure" people. The illusory nature of a single, authentic population facilitates populists' journey towards the people's moral impersonification. The resentment that fuelled this global revolt was caused, and in turn enhanced, by the challenging of the hegemonic neoliberal formation (Mouffe, 2018). Capitalism was considered unrivalled after the Soviet Union's fall, yet a wealthy financial minority – whose hyperglobalization tremendously exacerbated inequalities – was seen as responsible for the 2008 crisis, which affected the majority of Western society. Frustration became synonymous to distrust. Post-modernity is witnessing a "crises of knowledge", as all traditional knowledge logics are under attack: universities, newspapers and the "establishment" (Grossberg, 2017). "Post-truth's" winning of the "word of the year" title was far from arbitrary in 2016.

After years of non-elected governments, Italy in 2018 witnessed its first populist government, the Northern League-M5S coalition. Respectively, their "warhorses" are the protection of Italy from immigrants' invasion and the attribution of dignity through citizens' income. Populists awaken emotionality, at the expense of rationality, through their "spectacle": dominant values' rejection (Sutherland, 2012). The Five Star's anti-vaccine stance demonstrates the Enlightenment notions' erosion, however Italy's populists are no longer an oppositional movement; nowadays they form the Government (Urbinati et al., 2018). Chantal Mouffe's work proves invaluable to this research, and the latter owes its relevance to Culture Studies to the study of Italian

cultural institutions' agonistic approaches and counter-hegemonic practices aimed at the populist common-sense, as well as the analysis of populism appearance's link to the crises of knowledge and institutions' battling of such (2013; Grossberg, 2017). Mouffe draws from Gramsci's *egemonia*, such as the non-violent dynamics through which the ruling class convinces the lower ones that its prestige-derived domination is necessary (1957). Just as the ruling class' hegemony depends on its ability to produce intellectuals, Gramsci argues organic thinkers are vital to the opposition of the "common-sense". Intellectuals can choose whether to agree with the dominant thought, however it is vital that they acknowledge the responsibility that comes with their privileged position in society (Chomsky, 2011). Widespread agreement surrounds intellectuals' fact-sharing role: such must speak truth to power (Foucault, 1977; Bourdieu, 1989; Chomsky, 1967; Said, 1993). Institutions' intellectual opposition to populist notions imply the privileged location's use; the Italian outlining of such is another contribution this paper offers to Culture Studies. Carr similarly posits that cultural institutions' promise is to allow ordinary people to craft the truth, through the recounting of public voices and common memory (2003). Especially within uncertainty, these educational spaces bear the duty to foster thinking, a "culture of enquiry" through multiple contexts' recording. Agonistic views are certainly productive, as debate is a potent knowledge-producing activity (Grossberg, 2017). In fact, all social orders are contingent and can thus be opposed counter-hegemonically (Mouffe, 2013). Despite the necessary "us-them" antagonistic positions in politics, conflict and dialogue must have an agonistic nature, where adversaries battle for their ideals' gaining of hegemony, without delegitimizing others' views. Agonism can also occur in art through the production of alternative narratives: conviviality can solely be elicited through conflict (Power, 2018; Santos & Cachola, 2018).

Once the conceptual framework, such as populism, the crises of knowledge and cultural institutions' role have been noted in chapter 2, one will outline Fondazione Feltrinelli in chapter 3 and later compare its duties to Italy's cultural institution landscape in the following chapter. The sources featured are mainly secondary, as this report is lecture and library-based. Feltrinelli became the centre of my research, thus my case study, given my interning experience there; such will be mentioned in chapter 3. Fondazione is a leading European educational, social and political cultural

institution. This hub owes its left origin to the founder's joining of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and his wish to create a library documenting the working class movements' history, which later became Fondazione. Lombardy's Archival Superintendence has confirmed the historical relevance of the Foundation's archive, which is at the heart of its scope (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). The institution's "supply chain" typically follows the patrimony-research-education-divulgence and publication macro sequence, and includes performative arts. The two past events' seasons - *Stagione Ribelle* (2017-2018) and *Stagione Capitale* (2018-2019) - are analysed together with the hub's self-proclaimed role and discussion of its duty. Through its research, free promulgation and historical role it aims to initiate agonistic dialogue, interdisciplinarity, truth and a plural society. Fondazione acts counter-hegemonically to populist notions, and an increase in its political responsibility is noticed with the establishment of Italy's populist coalition. Critical thinking is promoted through the description of populism, its causes and links to the crises of knowledge, however the Foundation prioritizes its holistic service to citizens. Populism is a symptom of democracy's profound crisis (Urbinati et al. 2018), and the institution's ultimate objective is to strengthen democracy through capitalism's rethinking. Given chapter 4's comparative purpose, Fondazione Feltrinelli's epistemological role and development of a convivial common-sense are paralleled to Fondazione Basso's dialogue and meeting of contemporary and historical teachings; yet the latter deems human rights' valuing as paramount. Just as Basso's responsibility derives from its founder's participation in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples' writing, Istituto Sturzo's role entails the comparison of Luigi Sturzo's ideology, popularism, to populism. The Institute acts as an educational institution through counter-hegemonic harmonizing practices and citizens' call to action, however limits its inquiry to compare as a means to contrast; popularism and populism are solely explored. Finally, the Istituto Dignitatis Humanae is unique to Italy's cultural landscape as it advocates for human dignity through Bannan and Cardinal Burke's pro-life, anti-Muslim and anti-corrupt elite "voicing of the people". Moffit believes populists initiate a state of crisis (2016), and one argues such political school for anti-pluralist warriors employs such to foster a crusade rhetoric.

PART 1: Conceptual Framework

Chapter 2: *Populism, crises of knowledge and the role of cultural institutions*

“When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, there were 11 countries around the world with borders and fences. By 2016, 70 countries had built such” (Ai Weiwei, 2017)

“Democracies end when they are too democratic” (Sullivan, 2016)

## 2.1 – Populism: A Global Phenomenon

Nowadays a powerful term has been widely employed to describe political movements and politicians such as Farage, Varoufakis, Sanders, Grillo and Trump: “populists”. The Podemos movement in Spain, Marine Le Pen and Orbán as well have been defied so. The term “populist” has gained ubiquity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century given it is a global phenomenon (Urbinati et al., 2018). As such, one shall begin its analysis through a brief review of contemporary history. All of the concepts explored in the following conceptual framework are believed to enrich the understanding of populism’s pervasive status and to own a palpable link to both Culture Studies and Fondazione Feltrinelli’s convivial work and political duty. Mouffe finds leftist parties guilty of non-receptiveness and “class essentialism” (2018). Left politics, whether social-democratic or Marxists, were unable to adapt to a series of resistance movements emerged in the wake of 1968, nor were they receptive to a second wave of anti-racism, feminism and gay movements. This inability is likely to have originated from the dominant left essentialist thinking, the notion that political identities and interests are the expression of social agents’ positions in relation to the means of production. This prevented the left from acknowledging that the current demands are no longer class-dependent. Novel forms of subordination have arisen outside of the productive process, thus originating priorities that no longer correspond to individuals’ social structure position (2018). The current “hegemonic neoliberal formation” that Mouffe speaks of is characterized by “hyperglobalization”: the dramatic increase in the already existing globalization - economic, cultural and political world exchange – which took place from the 1980s (Rodrik, 2011). This formation is an adaptation by modern capitalism of classical liberal ideas. Neoliberalism was born from Adam Smith’s God given right to have a free economy, make a profit and accumulate wealth (1776; Hall, 2011). The defenders of such order claim that it drives up the world’s GDP and helps reduced poverty, however rapid acceleration continued steadily up until the crash of 2008, when its contradictions appeared.

Blair once stated: “the choice is not between a left-wing economic policy and a right-wing one but between a good economic policy and a bad one” (as cited in Mouffe, 2018: 4). The former British Prime Minister’s words resonate with Thatcher’s well-

known “there is no alternative” (TINA) to neoliberal globalization ethos. Blair’s New Labour Party discarded its leftist identity in favour of a centre-left one, and promoted what Hall defines as the typical social-democratic version of neoliberalism (2011). The fall of the USSR was another reason for TINA’s *dogma* legitimation, as by 1991 there no longer was any opposition to a world free market (Cox, 2017). Several low-wage, emerging economies as India and China joined this formation. Ordinary citizens were however voiceless in regards to this global shift, as “neoliberal globalization was seen as a fate we had to accept, and political questions were reduced to mere technical issues dealt with by experts” (Mouffe, 2018:4). “It is not merely a nationalist myth” (Cox, 2017:16) that millions of jobs have been lost in the West as a consequence of neoliberalism’s spreading. Further, a great expansion of the financial sector took place at the expense of the productive economy, to which the exponential increase in economic inequality witnessed recently can be attributed (Mouffe, 2018). Wealth became ever more concentrated in the hands of a minority. The degree to which the global population felt powerless as the 2008 economic crisis unfolded was unprecedented. The financial crisis hit Western economies the hardest, particularly the EU, hence undermined the faith in the establishment’s competence. The grand neoliberal formation had shown its limits. “Who, after 2008, would ever believe the experts again?” (Cox, 2017:16)

Gramsci’s *interregnum*<sup>1</sup> resulted from the Lehman Brothers’ collapse: a period of crisis characterized by the challenging of the current hegemonic formation (1957; Mouffe, 2018). A rare occasion showed as wealthy bankers, an elite minority whose influence was furthered by the financial sector’s hyperglobalized growth, could be seen as responsible for a crisis that affected the majority of Western society (BBC, 2018). The first signs of disaffection with democratic institutions manifested themselves in the rising levels of abstention since the 2000s (Mouffe, 2018), and later polls detected that trust in elected representatives in Western countries has rarely been lower (The Guardian, 2018). The already disillusioned European crowd was also affected by the crisis’ consequent austerity policies, specifically southern nations. Populism’s touted direct representation, within this frame of frustration, presented

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<sup>1</sup> An extraordinary instance where the traditional social order or legal frame is contested by novel formations (Mouffe, 2018).

itself as an effective means to restore control to the people. Ideally, the former incorporates society within the State: the ruler uses representation as a hegemonic strategy that shortens the distance between the voted and voters (Urbinati et al., 2018). While different understandings of populism exist, there is a shared definition: such impersonates the people's will (Müller, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Urbinati et al., 2018; Moffit, 2016). Populist politicians certainly echo the people's voice, yet this characteristic is not sufficient to differentiate such from any other individual who hopes to gain votes in a democratic society. One believes this definition to be effective as well as preliminary. It is not enough to distinguish populist politicians from any other individual who wishes to be democratically elected through their popular appeal.

Naim and Mouffe agree that populism is not an ideology; the former defines such as a demagogic strategy to obtain and retain power, and the latter states this political way takes different ideological forms according to time and place (2017; 2018). In fact this glocal<sup>2</sup> movement is equated to different phenomena around the world, as it frequently alludes to economic mismanagement and clientelism in Latin America and to xenophobia in Europe (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Today we are certainly experiencing a "populist moment" mostly marked by right and far right political actors (Mouffe, 2018). Mudde and Kaltwasser recognize populism's flexibility as well; such rarely exists in a "pure" form. Unlike "full" ideologies as Fascism, populism is "thin-centered", or has a restricted morphology, thus appears necessarily attached to other ideologies. In the majority of cases it is linked to multiple ideological elements, crucial for the promotion of appealing political projects. This is one of the reasons for populism's multiple shapes. Elitism, politics as predominantly or exclusively a minority's affair, is an opposite of populism. Populism is "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus the 'corrupt elite' and which argues politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017:6). As exemplified by Chàves<sup>3</sup>' motto, the populist leader typically embodies a notion of collective representation: "I am not an

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<sup>2</sup> With both global and local characteristics.

<sup>3</sup> Venezuela's 45<sup>th</sup> President (2002- 2013).

individual - I am the people” (BBC, 2018). One suggests populists’ brilliance derives from the exploitation of a key anthropological notion. Levy-Strauss perceives humans’ understanding of the world as deriving from the innate formulation of dichotomies: night and day, female and male, nature and culture (1962). Populist representatives have managed to capitalize on our natural, binary simplification of reality to understand it, and to construct a persuasive “people vs. elite” dichotomy.

“We are the people. Who are you?” (Müller, 2016:6) was Erdogan’s<sup>4</sup> response to domestic opponents. Miller notes populist movements are mere examples of collective freedom, constitutive of democracies (The Guardian, 2018). One strongly counters this view as to deem populism a typical revolt is to ignore the unrivalled threat it poses to the democratic project. Whilst the term populism is often used as a synonym for anti-establishment or associated to frustration, such feature is not sufficient to be considered a populist either; rather these political actors are consistently anti-pluralistic (Müller, 2016; Urbinati et al., 2018). Pluralism values diversity, holds that power should be distributed throughout people and that several social groups with overlapping interests are found in society (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Populism’s opposition to plurality emerges when its leaders claim that solely they can represent the people, and portray their competitors as part of the immoral elite. Even within the general public, those who do not support populists are not part of the “pure” people. Müller understands this thin-layered ideology as identity politics that are greatly powerful: the people is an “empty signifier”, a construction that allows for much flexibility (2016; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Identity is always relative and solely functions in conjunction with “the other”, through which it constructs and defines itself (Hegel, 2005). Rather than an empirical representation of citizens, populism employs a distinctly moral one. However “democracy requires pluralism and the recognition that we need to find fair terms of living together as free, equal, but also irreducibly diverse citizens” (Müller, 2016:3). The idea of a single, homogenous, authentic people is a fantasy (Habermas, 1962). The people’s illusory nature facilitates the populists’ journey towards a moral impersonification of the population.

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<sup>4</sup> Turkey’s 25<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister (2003 - 2014), and 12<sup>th</sup> President (2014- present).

Being popular and being populist are not the same (BBC, 2018). How does a populist movement effectively formulate a “people’s voice” narrative? Populist leaders often call for greater transparency through the implementation of more referendums, elections and recall votes (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). It is common for populists to prefer direct democracy to “complex” systems. The Five Star Movement was the first to develop a political programme through citizens’ online votes: “solutions are chosen directly by citizens. M5S responds to the needs of ordinary people and not the big corporations which finance political campaigns” (Programma M5S, 2019). Not only do the people become sovereigns, mass clientelism is often exhibited in populism: citizens who become supporters often turn into clients of such movements given they receive bureaucratic or material benefits (Müller, 2016). Argentina’s longstanding Peronist party for instance distributed medicines, sugar and milk while rallying between 1990-2000, in the country’s poor areas to harvest votes (Auyero, 2001).

Could it be that we call all popular politicians that we dislike “populists”? Certainly most political anxieties become associated to such (Müller, 2016). Moffit notes the term is especially misused in the European context, while Mouffe accuses the media of using such as a derogatory label for all of those who oppose the *status quo* (2016; 2018). Gandhi’s much celebrated independence movement has been defined as populist as well: the term is not employed in a defamatory manner here, rather it signals his mobilization of the lower castes (Subramanian, 2013). Hence this political designation cannot be solely perceived as pejorative. One until now has implicitly attempted to address the term’s confusion: populism is a versatile ideology that reoccurs distinctly in the world and depends on a prevalent construction, a single people. Part of the confusion could also originate from the fact that movements and people rarely claim the populist title themselves (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Despite the intellectual frustration with the term, the people’s resentment takes priority: academics agree that its supporters cannot be ignored (Müller, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Mouffe, 2018). Populism is too central to contemporary Western politics to be discarded, and excluding populists from debate is not an option, as it would resonate with its anti-pluralistic will to exclude (Müller, 2016). For the left – whose links to Fondazione Feltrinelli will be explored later - to deem right wing parties as extremists, simply link their attractiveness to lack of education and deny such the right to participate in democratic debate, given the imposition of a “moral”

barrier, entails a politically unjust behaviour (Mouffe, 2018). Mouffe affirms it is tempting for the left to disqualify rightist populism without admitting its own responsibility for its emergence. Rather than excluding right-wing populism as fostered by atavistic passions *a priori*, the democratic origin of their demands must be acknowledged. Extremism should not be justified, as should its supporters not be attributed responsibility for the articulation of their demands (2018). University graduates in 2016 were twice as likely to vote for Hillary Clinton than for Trump, as were UK graduates significantly more prone to vote “remain” in Brexit (Waller et al., 2017). While a correlation between lack of education and populist swings is undeniable, it is imperative that both politicians and citizens do not fall in the prevalent trap of merely viewing populism’s requests as irrational.

Populism can be summarized as a politician’s symbolic enrichment, the gaining of the citizens’ sole representative status. Populists’ echoing of the people’s will is only partly exhaustive as a definition: such must also ignore society’s multifacetedness. The notion of a homogenous people is immensely troublesome as it thrives on innate dichotomous thinking, is versatile as well as a fantasy that denies democracy’s constitutive plurality. The neoliberal formation born in the post-war era, which “seemed destined to normative uncontested solitude after the defeat of the Soviet model” (Urbinati, 2018:10) is suffering from a rapid decline in legitimacy. The Director of the European Consortium of Political Research notes that populist parties emerged in Europe in the 2000s, however only started gaining wide support in 2008 (BBC, 2018). Aristotle argued the shrinking of the middle class and pluralism’s crisis typically leads to what Gramsci later formulated as the interregnum: “the 2008 crisis created a full-blown radical protest against European mainstream politics, allowing for new forms of populism to arise. Such forms reinterpret the left-right dichotomy, unifying the people’s category against the ruling elite and thus *de facto* allowing for the disappearance of class articulations” (Chiantera-Stutte, 2018:180). We are currently living in the “age of anger” (Mishra, 2017): the neoliberal model’s contradictions are being questioned indiscriminately by both political camps. This global phenomenon can be rationalized through the acknowledgement of a cross-cultural discontent with the establishment. When bearing in mind the powerlessness sentiment, austerity, inequality and disillusion that hyperglobalization and the financial crash brought about, it is easier to grasp how the populist “people-against-

the-enemy-elite” rhetoric benefitted from novel attention. It is the assumption that populism is both characterized by a democratic origin and dangerous credos that implies the role of cultural institutions – as traditional knowledge sources - to counter it.

## 2.2 - Crises of Knowledge

The failure of the neoliberal model is located within the “crises of knowledge” frame. The plurality of the term derives from the fact that all traditional production of knowledge logics are under attack. This is not a singular phenomenon – crisis - as journalism, education and research all appear to have lost their authority (Grossberg, 2017; Dahlgren, 2018). Traditional journalism has lost its status as arbiter of the truth and has decreasing audiences. Rather than a “static cerebral storehouse” (2018:21), Dahlgren introduces knowledge as the integration of novel information to people’s existing frames of references, which includes lived experience. Nowadays the social perception of knowledge is that of a troubled entity. Cynicism has become our daily bread whilst the Enlightenment’s principles have become secondary. *Sapere aude*, to have the courage to use one’s own understanding, was Kant’s motto: an enlightened thought escapes immaturity through the cultivation of the mind (1784). Truth however is increasingly malleable, as people are faced with ever-changing contradictory facts. Effective examples of such are evolution, vaccinations, climate change, the earth’s shape and Obama’s birthplace. Within the crises of knowledge there is one of commensuration: shared standards used to measure competing claims’ value no longer exist. Whilst one cannot avoid mentioning Trump’s fake news, the crises did not originate with his rule. The problematization of knowledge should not be limited to the right, as leftists often accept conspiracy theories against science (Grossberg, 2017). Nor is this failure recent, as Lyotard had previously noted that the nature of knowledge could not survive unchanged as societies entered post-industrial ages (1979). “The ideology of communicational ‘transparency’... will begin to see the State as a factor of opacity” (1979: 5). Nonetheless the author argues that information depends on power, therefore knowledge will increasingly become a question of government with the computerization of societies.

Opacity and the State are increasingly perceived as synonymous, given the shedding of light on the establishment's corruption (Meer, 2017), yet the latter cannot be said to monopolize the production of knowledge. Veracity and the State are also growingly mutually exclusive due to the politicization of knowledge (Grossberg, 2017; Dahlgren, 2018). Opinions about most topics have become polarized, and objectivity is losing to fanaticism. "Fake news" has become a global buzzword and is employed by distinct hegemonic forces to delegitimize political opponents (Farkas, 2018). The term gained popularity during the 2016 U.S. elections and liberal media sources as CNN and the New York Times critique such as online misleading information. Trump uses it as a derogatory designation for untruthful mainstream media. Even the left has accused the latter of lying, and the erosion of journalism's credibility is partly caused by these political attacks (Grossberg, 2017). Far from solely being a fabricated means of political attack, fake news are fabricated realities. Those who forged Obama's Kenyan birth certificate view profit as their priority (Farkas & Schou, 2018). "Fake news is cheap to produce - far cheaper than real news - and profitable" (The Washington Post, 2016).

Post-factuality can also be attributed to information's unprecedented speed and abundance, and to the "amazon effect" (Dahlgren, 2018; Grossberg, 2017). Bauman states humans entered a post-modern era as "the long effort to accelerate the speed of movement has presently reached its natural limit...instantaneity" (2000:10-11). Not only has information become inexhaustible in this 4.0 digital panorama, it is also accessible instantaneously: news platforms can report within minutes about a Californian earthquake. The epistemological crisis is heightened by Bauman's post-modern conquest, as decision-making necessitates time, which in turn has become a rarity in our cyber "ever-new" environment. Decreasing attention and standardised thinking are becoming the norm as technology fights imagination (Carr N., 2014). Whilst Grossberg does not doubt individuals are overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of information available, the author supposes every human generation has felt this way. One can now describe the "river occurrence": Grossberg and Dahlgren agree on people's tendency to expose themselves to sources they already agree with, through the following of specific media outlets they trust and the social media sharing of information with like-minded friends. The amazon effect is a characteristic of contemporary society for the former author, however only the latter believes the

abundance-caused-disorientation to be legitimate nowadays and “citizen journalism” to be an adaptive strategy born to counter such. One supports the “evolutionary” claim: today’s information overload is unparalleled in time, hence people navigate this tsunami of facts through an erected suspicion of novel sources. A lack of trust in media sources derived from the notion of “the other” has emerged, creating “echo chambers” where digital gatherings of individuals in agreement occur (Dahlgren, 2018). Individuals inform themselves both through their social media friends’ divulgations and by seeking specific ideological safe spaces. The screening out of opposing information that fosters discursive divides is enhanced by the technological algorithms that select information based on previous searches.

Echo-chambers awaken sentiments as the “gravitational pull of group identity reduces societal insecurity and promotes emotionality” (2018:26). Affect is another means to deal with excessive information. As politicians lying gained attention in the past century, citizens started channelling their narrative of lament through social networks in the 1990s. Shared ideals promote trust thus alternative facts and new epistemic realities are disseminated within these counter-public spheres, often of extra-parliamentarian politics. Now that sentimentality “is on the table”, one can underline a fundamental populist feature: spectacle (Sutherland, 2012). Populist politicians tend to make spectacles of themselves to foster affect and construct the people’s rhetoric. The spectacle is directed to a “suggestible” crowd and initiates emotionality through dominant values’ rejection. While the left at times still posits the privileged elite as the sole legitimate knowledge producers, the right comparatively often emphasizes the silent majority (Grossberg, 2017). Populism can be right or left, yet it is conservatives that delegitimise higher education by questioning the need for research and funding. Similarly to universities’ loss of authority, cultural capital is perceived as less valuable since rightist populist do not value an educated citizenry. The populist dismissal of dominant notions – born from the “us-and-them” ethos – is variously directed to “the government, liberal politicians, mainstream media, intellectuals, experts and immigrants“ (Dahlgren, 2018:24). Visions of a “pure” nation and racist-scapegoating occur daily in populists’ spectacles and its supporters’ echo chambers. The sentiment witnessed today is commonly one of hatred: emotionality unfortunately does not equal humanity. Whilst the Berlin Wall’s fall was generally celebrated as the end of the Western world’s division, the supporters of the wall’s crumbling would

have been disenchanted had they known 60 more would be built in the coming decades.

Lyotard had rightly predicted the nature of epistemology would shift through computerization (1979), however had not anticipated the destabilization of democracy's principles. "Civic cultures" are at the heart of democracy's survival and participation, and knowledge and trust are vital to such cultures (Dahlgren, 2018). It is telling that 2016's word of the year was "post-truth": "circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford English Dictionaries, 2016). This trend has become widespread and should be distinguished from classic deception. It emphasizes a new epistemic regime where reasoned, factual evidence is discarded in favour of an emotional response (Dahlgren, 2018). Global warming deniers treat unanimous scientific evidence as subjective opinions. "Truth becomes reconfigured as an inner subjective reality" (2018:26). Even though State apparatuses certainly contributed to the collapse of truth through the politicization of facts, they cannot be said to monopolize the production of the current increasingly emotional knowledge. A paradox unfolds: whilst neoliberalism's individualistic tendencies are failing, personal inner-directed beliefs gain prevalence in shaping the public's opinions.

When the long-standing authority of all traditional knowledge producers fails, citizens turn away from *sapere aude* and turn to their inner, often problematic truths. The post-modern era is now also perceived as the post-truth one, a time when knowledge is in crisis. Even though facts can never be understood as fully objective, given they are found within ideological currents, we have officially reached a moment of distrust of unprecedented magnitude (Dahlgren, 2018; Grossberg, 2017). Excessive information, speed and alternative facts are intrinsic to our present day. Fake news' recurrence highlights the valuing of profit over morality and facts' promotion. All discussions have become politicized, and the polarization of beliefs reflects democracy's crisis. Rather than a characteristic, the amazon effect is a survival tactic arisen to navigate through excessive information. Technology is in fact redefining epistemology, and discursive divides characterized by incompatible views of reality are showing. You-tube in January 2019, overwhelmed by emotionality's growing supremacy over rationality, declared war on all conspiracy theories on such platform.

Is freedom of expression no longer a viable option? Do we value “freedom” more than truth? What we do know is that no traditional knowledge producer – newspaper, cultural institution, intellectual - is safe in the quicksand of failed shared truth.

### 2.3 - Italy’s Emerging Populism and Crises of Knowledge



**Figure 1: Salvini supporter kissing his hand**

© Enzo Lacopo (Lentelocale , 2018)

Italian politics have often been international media’s target of ridicule, given the Bunga-Bunga scandal<sup>5</sup> or the fact that there have been six governments between 2011 and 2018. Nonetheless Italy is no longer just scandalous politics: its first post-war extremist government is arguably in power. The coalition between the Northern League and the Five Star Movement (M5S) is a crucial phase in Europe’s populist emergence (Urbinati et al., 2018). Before delving into politics, it must be noted that the number of Italians living in poverty has tripled in the past ten years, with 18 million risking poverty, while its economy has been the slowest in the euro zone (Reuters, 2018; BBC, 2018). In 2011 Berlusconi’s government (*Popolo della Libertà*, PdL; right) fell, leading to two technical governments, such as a non-elected Prime

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<sup>5</sup> Term employed by the media to signal Berlusconi’s notorious parties with prostitutes, at times under-aged.

Minister nominated by the President. The first was the technocrat Monti, an economist, who was then replaced by Letta (*Partito Democratico*, PD; left) who led a coalition between PD, PdL and the centrist *Scelta Civica*. This government was a unique one in that Letta was appointed by the President yet his cabinet included both technicians and politicians and was considered a Grand Coalition (*larghe intese*) given the diverging parties it included (ANSA, 2016). In 2014 Renzi, PD, became the third non-elected Prime Minister in three years as he asked the PD leadership to withdraw their backing from Letta and formed a government, which received the majority from the lower chamber (Reuters, 2014). He then resigned three years later after he lost a referendum he had called. The vote proposed changes to the Constitution, to transfer many decision-making powers from regions to the central government, and to increase the lower chamber's powers at the expense of the upper one. An increasingly centralized government was expected to further its pro-establishment reforms, unleashing greater competition within the labour market and limiting bureaucracy (The Economist, 2016). Shortly before the referendum The Economist noted it appeared as a "call for Italy to open up for more globalization... A 'no', would offer the next piece of evidence that voters in Western countries are growing disillusioned with those in power" (2016). Indeed it acted as evidence of such frustration and eventually resulted in the aforementioned Lega-Five Stars Movement coalition. After years of non-elected governments – within a growingly critical economic situation - and when asked whether to further centralize the lower chamber's power, the Italian majority rejected the ruling elite. In the 2018 vote the Northern League, lead by Matteo Salvini, gained 17.4% of votes whilst Luigi Di Maio's M5S earned 32.6% (Repubblica, 2018). Given no party or coalition can rule without gaining at least 40% of votes, which equates to the majority of parliamentary seats, the said leaders had to consider what they had previously declared as unthinkable - a Green-Yellow (Lega-M5S) coalition (BBC, 2018). Salvini became the Minister of the Interior whilst Di Maio became that of Labour. A lawyer and professor with links to the Five Stars, Giuseppe Conte, was nominated by the President as Prime Minister of the "Government of Change", a term coined by the new coalition to underline its revolutionary intensions (Contratto per il Governo di Cambiamento, 2018).

Where they stand			
Parties/coalitions	Migration	Europe	Economy
Centre-right	Deport illegal migrants, take control of borders, Marshall Plan for Africa	Revise treaties, refuse overregulation, no more austerity policies from Europe, protect "Made in Italy" products	Facilitate credit lines for small- and medium-sized enterprises, help young people access labour market
Democratic Party	No to Dublin regulation, stop aid for countries refusing to share burden	More European political and social integration	Reduce unemployment to under 9%, youth unemployment below 22%, guaranteed minimum wage, equal pay for women
Five Star Movement	Revise Dublin regulation, distribute asylum seekers across EU	Find alternatives to the euro, strike alliances with Southern European countries, oppose austerity policies, protect "Made in Italy" products	Free trade union representation, worker participation in decision-making, shorten working day, incentivise part-time work

**Figure 2: Where do Italian parties stand?**

(BBC, 2018)

The Northern League, short for The Northern League for Padania's Independence, was founded by Bossi in 1991 (BBC News, 2012). The party had the separatist wish of establishing a northern Italian State called *Padania*, the river Po's country. Such river crosses the entire width of northern Italy, from Turin to the Adriatic Sea, and Bossi used to have yearly rituals at the river's source where he would fill glasses with sacred water, surrounded by supporters. The politician often shouted "thieving Romans!" (*Roma Ladrona*) as Padania's independence would have stopped "hard-working" northerners from having to pay taxes to sustain "lazy" southerners (*terroni*)'s welfare. Autonomy also meant such no longer had to answer to Rome's corrupt politicians (BBC News, 2012). Nowadays the party has abandoned most of its features: its name was abbreviated to a more "inclusive" *Lega* for the 2018 elections and pagan rituals were substituted by Salvini's use of rosaries (Urbinati et al., 2018). One of Bossi's beliefs that was not discarded was his intolerance with regards to immigrants: Salvini wants all Italian ports to have crucifixes as barriers for human influx (2018). The narrative is constituted by slogans such as "Italy First", "More Justice" and "Italy cannot turn into a refugee camp". When rallying in the Basilicata

region Salvini argued “the League’s battles on immigration, security and good governance should be fought here too, not just in the north” (Bloomberg, 2018). Whilst Salvini used to make fun of Neapolitans’ smell, his mocking ended with the coming elections: ”I’m here (in the south) because I answered a call, and I wanted to give something to the people” (2018). Salvini not only has come to be seen as the voice of the people, as polls demonstrate he is the most appreciated politician, with 49% of approval rates (Repubblica, 2018); one believes a true “cult of the leader” is now taking place. Figure 1 portrays one of the many Salvini-supporters who have kissed his hands as a sign of utter respect. The previous citation is salient to this paper: Salvini’s words denote his own portrayal as a magnanimous person whose altruistic duties have drawn him to the south of Italy. As opposed to a political strategy to gain votes before the election, his cross-country popularity proves Salvini was successful in depicting his southern likings as a genuine new-found interest in promoting legality in such deprived area. More than collective representation, his travels’ depiction appear to echo the Messiah’s calling, as Salvini implies he is the sole one that “answered a call”, the only one who thinks the south deserves justice as well.

“We are not leftist nor rightist, as those are not ideologies in which we believe in... I represent a cheated generation which is now gaining power everywhere” (Agi, 2017). Through these words Di Maio sums up the MS5’s political stance; its politics of change are firstly represented by the fact it does not identify as a party. The comedian Grillo established the movement in 2009, denounced Italian politics of cronyism, and rapidly gained votes. M5S promises direct democracy through the already mentioned online citizens’ programme (“the programme for Italy, written by Italians”) (Programma M5S, 2019), to fight exercised bureaucracy and strives for “proactive referendums”, where citizens’ proposals are discussed in the Parliament to become potential laws (Contratto per il Governo di Cambiamento, 2018). Di Maio notes “we understand quality of life as our priority, which entails the abolishment of poverty” (Rainews, 2018) through the implementation of citizens’ income (*reddito di cittadinanza*). Citizens’ income is understood as a means to reintegrate an individual in working life and to preserve his dignity (Contratto per il Governo di Cambiamento, 2018). Through the calculation of the poverty risk based on one’s patrimony and wage, the income will provide a maximum of 780 euros per month. The benefiter will

have to prove his active participation by accepting 3 offers in 2 years at least; new work centres will aid such. In fact all European countries except Greece and Italy provide an income to those under the poverty line. A study in 2015 calculated that the income would amount to a 14.9 billion cost for the Italian State: 10.6% of families who reside in Italy should receive such (ISTAT, Senato, 2015). Nonetheless the OECD noted the income is not a useful tool to reduce poverty (2017). Its Italian critics in fact believe this aid will not incentivize Italians to search for jobs (Boschi, 2019), rather it will worsen the already critical public debt (Monti, 2018; Boeri, 2019). Finland recently announced its two-year basic income experiment improved health and happiness yet did not affect unemployment (Independent, 2019). Further, Italy has historically had a tax evasion and non-declared work issue – the yearly estimate for the first is that of 132 billion euros – and a prevalent worry concerns “illegitimate” individuals’ benefitting from the income (Senato, 2018; IPSOA, 2019). The Five Stars claim it “will favour the occupation and economic growth of the country” (Contratto per il Governo di Cambiamento, 2018:34) and that Italians’ quality of life will be certainly improved, as opposed to hearing politicians’ typical, untruthful reassuring. Esposito, a 64-year-old Neapolitan, told the Guardian he had not voted in 40 years until the “young and fresh” M5S came along (2018). He is one of the millions of cheated Italian people whose political trust was re-established by this movement’s assumed restoration of Italy’s dignity. The hopeful recovery of control to the people within a disaffected present is exemplified by this person’s truly rare voting.

The Government of Change’s appeal rests in its dismissal of class essentialist rhetoric: the League and M5S recognize the economic crash created a narrative of lament indiscriminately in the majority. They also view the Italian political elite as characterized by opacity. Anti-education and anti-elite often go hand in hand. One argues these politicians’ attractiveness is further heightened by their true educational representation of the population, given their modest educational titles and political background. Italy is the penultimate in the EU, with Romania coming last, in terms of university degrees: 26.9% of 30-34 year-olds hold such (as cited in ANSA, 2018). Grillo became a politician in 2009 after a lifetime of comedy, Salvini never received a higher education degree and nor did Di Maio, who entered politics at 26 after a few years of waiting tables (The Guardian, 2018). The Minister of Education was

nominated for his practical skills given his numerous teaching positions, rather than his Physical Exercise degree (Repubblica, 2018). Traditional cultural capital prioritizes intellectual over practical knowledge (Bourdieu, 1984). The Minister's nomination further emphasizes the decreasing authority of cultural capital. One suggests the prevalent disillusion with the typical, cultured and distant politics gave away to more relatable characters; ones that emanated "freshness" as declared by the once-cynical Esposito.



**Figure 3: Salvini poses with pride next to a bulldozer**

(NeXt, 2018)

"Relatability" is a virtue, when "someone can understand or feel sympathy for" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Sympathising with populist ideals was further elicited in Italians through leading politicians' spectacle; the awakening of sentiment through the rejection of dominant values. Let us start this analysis through a common image promoted by the League: a bulldozer driven over Roma settlements. The visual offers a sensual immediacy, "an undeniable impact on first sight that a written text cannot replicate" (Mirzoeff, 1998:9). Salvini is seen in figure 3 standing next to such machine with an approving thumb. With the opposite symbol for death-sentences used by Roman emperors' with gladiators, he still condemns Romas to homelessness. "The growth in nomad settlements, the exponential growth in crimes committed by its

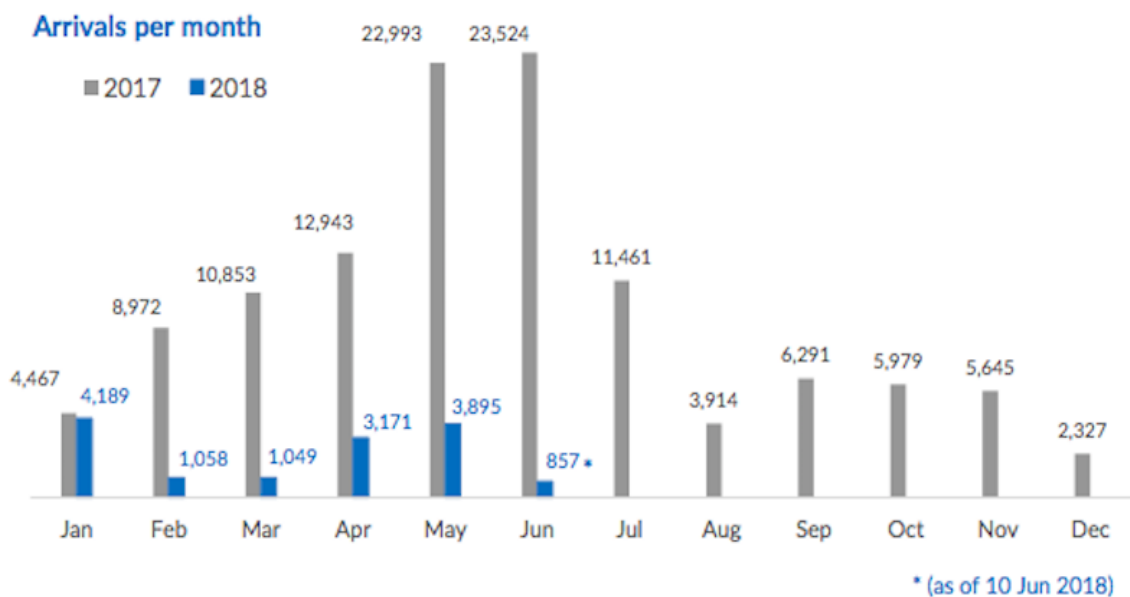
inhabitants...is a serious social problem...there are 40,000 Romas living in such settlements. The closing of all illegal settlements is needed” (Contratto per il Governo di Cambiamento, 2018:45). Not only has the League been succeeding in the destruction of multiple illegal Roma settlements for years, shortly after the coalition 450 people were driven out of a camp in Rome even though it was official, under the pretence of the land’s expired lease (OSCE, 2008; Reuters, 2018).

Moffit considers the perpetuation of a state of crisis to be a prevalent populist trait, and the League certainly initiates such, specifically by debating immigration far more than Roma settlements. There are “at least 500,000 illegal migrants present on our soil, hence an efficient repatriation policy is pivotal” (Contratto per il Governo di Cambiamento, 2018:27). Emotionality does not result in humanity: rather than stressing the humanitarian crisis taking place, as 5000 refugees drowned while crossing the Mediterranean in 2015 (Weiwei, 2017), Salvini stresses the number of foreigners in Italy, linking crime to such. Migrant arrivals’ in Europe were:

- 1,015,078 in 2015,
- 362,753 in 2016,
- 178,500 in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018).

Further, figure 4 shows the dramatic decrease in 2018 compared to the year before, specific to Italy. While one does not merely wish to undermine the crisis occurring in the Mediterranean, it must be mentioned that despite the fact immigrant arrival numbers in Italy are decreasing, the “narrative of invasion” is steadily gaining power. The crises of knowledge appears within that of migration, and within the tackling of Roma settlements regardless of their legality. Significantly “terrorism” and “mosque” appear in the same sentence in the Governments’ official document: “to prevent possible terroristic infiltrations it is necessary to create...an *ad hoc* Religion Ministry and the tracking of funds to build mosques, and other religious places” (Contratto per il Governo di Cambiamento, 2018:28). Salvini noted on Facebook “those who help clandestines hate Italians and will answer to the law and history” (Comozero, 2019) perhaps willingly drawing from history and paraphrasing Hitler himself. Populism creates degraded forms of democracy (Müller, 2016) and Salvini has certainly maintained an anti-pluralistic spirit: he relates terrorism to Islam (one of the world’s biggest faiths), clearly equates Romas to thieves and argues for immigrants’ repatriation policies. A strong Italian sentiment particularly arises through the

“othering” of one people against the migratory waves (Urbinati et al., 2018); those who help migrants are excluded from collective representation as they hate the nation. Bulldozers’ destruction of Roma homes has physical and ideological overtones. It functions as a potent metaphor for the League’s ethos: it is by physically preventing foreigners from having a future in Italy that its “pure” inhabitants will be granted success. For as long as humans will construct “others” they will be able to identify scapegoats.



**Figure 4: arrivals of migrants in Italy per month**

(UNHCR, 2018)

Whilst the League rejects the former, dominant approval of diversity, Grillo eroded another foundation of the Enlightenment: science. One of the key ideals M5S attached itself to is the movement against vaccines (no-vax). Italy has become a country where its tourists are recommended to take precautionary vaccines, as advised by Mexico (The New York Times, 2018). Renzi’s Government imposed 10 obligatory vaccines for children to attend school and was met by extensive criticism by the Five Stars: there are “links between vaccinations and specific illnesses as leukaemia, poisoning, cancer...” (The Guardian, 2017). Grillo has correlated vaccines to, among many, the immune systems’ weakening and autism; the latter is now a discredited claim born

from a study's speculation between the connection of MMR vaccines and such condition (2017). "It is hard to distinguish a fair speech from a manipulative one when freedom of expression characterizes the political order and when opinions, rather than truth, are found" (Urbinati et al., 2018:30). While the linking of cancer and autism to vaccines by the M5S was unfounded, a family recently won a court case against the Ministry of Health given an obligatory vaccine in 2003 caused a learning disability in their son (Repubblica, 2019). Vaccines can in fact result in side-effects, as any other drug, however these are incredibly rare: there are minuscule risks compared to the public worries (WHO, 2018; Fondazione Veronesi, 2018). Considering the Five Star's anti-science position includes both unfounded, contradictory and discredited facts, it can be likened to a conspiracy theory. Grillo asserted vaccines are solely promoted for pharmaceutical companies' profit. This spectacle's sentiment climaxed when a prestigious immunologist who denounced M5S's statements received a no-vax mom's wishes for him to drown in his seaside holidays. In this post-truth discursive atmosphere, emotional gains are winning over rational critique (Dahlgren, 2018). Italy's unprecedented crises of knowledge materialized: between 2016-2017 measles cases grew from 843 to 5006 (The New York Times, 2018). The politicization of knowledge carries with it much risk; an anti-system sentiment caused the immune systems' collapse for many.

"The cages and ties that are bringing back hunger and insecurity" (BBC, 2018) are the words chosen by Salvini not to describe a medieval torture as one might suppose, rather the European Union. Euro-scepticism arose in the 1990s in debtor countries particularly among populist politicians, given the phenomenon must be understood as an anti-system one (Urbinati et al., 2018). Lecompte identifies anti-Euro tendencies as fitting perfectly the illusory populist rhetoric given the fact a single European demos does not exist (2015). Both the Five Stars and Lega have criticized extensively Italy's relationship with the EU, although neither have campaigned to leave such. Salvini celebrated Brexit as the UK's freeing from the cage: the League has remained separatist in that it hopes for a return to national sovereignty. A Lega senate candidate noted "we have become the EU's rubbish dump" (Bloomberg, 2018) as more than 600,000 immigrants reached Italy since 2013 and as a critique to the EU's insufficient relocation aid (BBC, 2018). Furthermore, the demolition of the Roma official camp in Rome had been halted by the EU court, however policemen proceeded undisturbed:

“the emergence of Euro-scepticism induces the questioning of fundamental foundations...of the European project and even the maintenance of certain democratic and human rights’ principles, which have been given for granted and linked to Western democracy’s values” (Chiantera-Stutte, 2018:171).

As post-factuality usually goes, Italian journalism has come under attack. Di Maio announced “thankfully we vaccinated against fake news...many newspapers are dying as Gruppo L’Espresso which - I’m sorry for the workers - has already initiated employment termination processes as no one reads them anymore. They spend their days twisting the truth” (Repubblica, 2018). The newspapers Repubblica and L’Espresso’s combined response was a witty one: “not only were you unaware that it has been two years since Gruppo Espresso merged into Gruppo Gedi...which demonstrates once again you are not able to differentiate between fake news and facts, as you are an expert regarding the first...make your peace with the fact that (all Gedi newspapers) will not die and, following the Constitution...we will continue telling the truth, especially when uncomfortable for those in power” (Repubblica, 2018). The response defines Di Maio as “allergic” to truth as the dying of such group was his wish, not a fact. These newspapers followed their calling before this direct attack, as L’Espresso’s previous enquiry into Salvini’s links to the Mafia, and continued “full-steam” to tell uncomfortable information afterwards: the day Di Maio stated Italy will soon experience an economic boom as that of the ‘60s, several newspapers discredited this statement by underlining Italy is likely to have entered economic recession (2018; Repubblica, 2019; Il Post, 2019; ANSA, 2019). Can we blame readers for being confused? While L’Espresso reports the League’s Mafia-befriending, the Government of Change defined “defeating the mafia” as one of its goals on the official programme (Contratto per il Governo di Cambiamento, 2018). Again, the traditional authority’s jeopardy has manifested materially: the famous journalist Mentana received a death-threat stating “soon you will be punished” (Italia Sera, 2019) and two L’Espresso journalists covering a commemoration were physically abused by far-right extremists (Corriere.Roma, 2019). Italy did not escape the ever-growing, cross-cultural collapse in legitimacy of traditional knowledge producers.

One wishes to emphasize the fact that populism did not simply emerge in Italy: it travelled from an oppositional movement to that in charge (Urbinati et al., 2018). While it was commonly regarded as an ephemeral revolt in the past decades, Italian populism is now an established governmental reality (Anselmi, 2018). A movement of protest rebelling in the face of shared values has become the dominant culture. Let us take a step back: “the variations in the meanings of ‘culture’ are not a disadvantage, but a genuine complexity corresponding to real elements of experience” (Williams, 1998:49). Culture, from the Latin term *cultura* (“to cultivate the mind”), was intended since the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a possession of the middle and upper classes. *Hochkultur*, “high culture”, and *Kulturkritik*, the understanding of culture primarily through its aesthetic value, were born in concomitance in such époque. Nonetheless such definitions underwent a reversal in the 1960s (Mulhern, 2002; Assman, 2012). Culture Studies were born in response to radical changes in society: it was the numerous arrivals of immigrants in the UK that helped erode culture’s hierarchical notion. The Birmingham School rejected high culture to include all forms, as social and ethnic minorities’ traditions (Hall, 1980). Further, months after Woodstock Roszak coined the term “counter-culture” (1969). The author described society as a technocracy where “those who govern justify themselves by appeal to technical experts who, in turn, justify themselves by appeal to scientific forms of knowledge. Beyond the authority of science, there is no appeal” (1969:7). In such repressive Western culture the youthful revolts against authority, be it Anti-Vietnam protests, LSD consumption, Civil Rights movements, university campus radicals, all represent an anti-rationalist counter-culture which could result in a new, visionary society. Just as Roszak understood “technocracy’s children” as sharing a rejection of technocracy, Yinger wrote “I suggest the term contra-culture wherever the normative system of a group contains, as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of...the group surrounding dominant culture” (1960:629).



**Figure 5: Di Maio shortly after the unveiling of the first citizens' income card**

(Adnkronos, 2019)

Whilst Yinger identifies contra-culture as typically found among irresponsible youth in conflict with the adult, male role, the Lega-M5S Government is one of irresponsible adult males. “Populism, as an opinion movement, is a genuine democratic movement of protest“ (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017:25) which can nonetheless cause democracy’s deterioration. Populism has been around for decades yet resurfaced forcefully given the digital revolution, precarious economy and hence wide-spread uncertainty of what awaits us (Naim, 2017). The Lega was dismissed as a fanatical party by most Italians up until a few years ago, while it is no coincidence that M5S was founded the year after the economic crisis. Social media counter-public spheres aided these counter-cultures to grow and become mainstream culture. Populism’s strength rests both on media and images (Urbinati et al., 2018). Both innate dichotomous thinking and images’ potency are exploited by anti-system politics. The League employs bulldozers, a powerful image to materially represent their ideology, while the M5S use social media to increase the crises of knowledge through vaccines’ conspiracy theories. The spectacle-elicited-emotion is vital to defeat traditional notions. Relatability is promoted both through cultural capital’s loosing prominence and through spirituality. Religious belonging offers many symbols and images to Salvini, to sanctify the unity of the people; nonetheless his Christianity is without Christ (Guolo, 2011; Spini, 2018). Religious identity here is

primarily used in belonging rather than believing terms. Far from helping erode hierarchies as in England, the unprecedented migration wave in Italy fostered xenophobic, unwelcoming sentiments - which are in tension with the Vatican's stance. Surely through populism Italy's existing ills have appeared. Roszak rightly predicted the revolt against science and technical experts' ruling, but could not have imagined an anti-pluralistic governance being born from counter-cultures becoming dominant. Rather than a visionary society, Italy has become an extremist one. Again, the urgency of Italy's populist anti-democratic beliefs requires cultural institutions' action.

#### **2.4 – The Role of Intellectuals**

“For any intellectual who is willing to take on the burdens of being politically answerable, how might one respond with rigour to these dark times?” (Grossberg, 2017:1) One will commence the analysis of the role of typical producers of knowledge firstly through individuals, or intellectuals, and in the later sub-chapter will outline epistemological places, such as cultural institutions. Gramsci specifies all men are intellectuals, however not all have such immediate societal function (1957). While non-intellectuals do not exist, as even the most physical work requires technical qualification, the professional category is determined by cerebral activity. Gramsci differentiates between “traditional” intellectuals, those who give themselves an aura of historical continuity as teachers and priests, and “organic” ones that appear with the dominant social group. A social group's dominance, *egemonia* - the dynamics through which the dominant class convinces the lower ones without violence that its domination is necessary given its prestige – is determined by the elite's ability to organically produce intellectuals (1957). In fact the State is divided into the Government, which includes police, bureaucracies and other “coercive apparatuses”, and the “integral state” which contains the State and the civil society (religious, education, political activities). The integral state is intrinsic to the State's hegemony: school is the instrument to form intellectuals, which then are vital to perpetuate the ruling class' ideological domination (1957). Hegemony however does not always result in consensus, as organic thinkers are fundamental to counter “common-sense” view. Gramsci defined himself as a socialist, organic intellectual promoting new intellectuals' role as permanent persuaders, rather than eloquent

speakers, to initiate social change. Foucault on the other hand, distinguishes “universal intellectuals” from “specific ones”, respectively the promoters of educational ideas and the sociocultural type that appeared after World War II (1977). Rousseau and Voltaire had universal minds and were bearers of cross-cultural values: knowledge and truth are universal intellectuals’ eternal principles. Intellectuals have predominantly become “specific”, as they are dismissing their global strategy to develop a political struggle. What is paramount for intellectuals’ political role is following the regime of truth.

Privilege is an essential concept when analysing intellectuals’ political role. Bourdieu affirms intellectuals earn significance through their cultural capital, thus have the privilege of contesting authorities (1989). Thorndike stated “it is the great good fortune of mankind that there is a substantial correlation between intelligence and morality... consequently our superiors in ability are on average our benefactors” (as cited in Chomsky, 2011). Intellectualism has been used to legitimate wars, as the “Manifesto of 93 German Intellectuals” wrote before World War I “have faith in us! Believe that we shall carry on this war to the end as a civilized nation, to whom the legacy of a Goethe, a Beethoven, a Kant” (2011). Oppositely, Chomsky uses his position to contest his nation’s actions, declaring American politics continuously elevate self-interest over morality. America has installed murderous national security states, as in Brazil and Chile, to “protect” the continent from communism. American superiors tend to be benefactors solely with respect to its communist-phobic citizens, and formulate intellectuals’ position based on their sharing of the State’s views. Just as it used to praise intellectual dissidents in the USSR, it now honours the Iranian ones that oppose the clerical establishment. “Dissident” is a term used selectively: Mandela was on the US terrorist list up until 2008. Chomsky believes intellectuals who oppose the State are denigrated, yet started emphasizing their fundamental roles as a response to the Vietnam War’s distortion (1967). “Privilege yields opportunity, and opportunity confers responsibility” (Chomsky, 2011) hence intellectuals must act as decent human beings with an elevated status to promote justice, peace, freedom and truth. Chomsky emphasizes how individuals have a choice, to agree with the dominant thought or not, just as there was an alternative to Afghanistan’s invasion. It cost \$3.2 trillion and what is often omitted was the Taliban’s proposition to treat terrorism as a crime against humanity, trialling the likely subjects through an

international operation; of course the validity of this proposal cannot be certified. Unlike Nazi trials, Bin Laden was killed and his body disposed at sea. Ironically, Chomsky's text preceded the resurfacing of the Independent titled "anti-Soviet warrior puts his army on the road to peace" (Independent, 1993), a British newspaper which exemplifies the travelling dissident notion attributed to Bin Laden. In light of 9/11's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the author states it is his duty to question the need for Afghanistan's invasion and his nation's culpability.

How can intellectuals perform their truth-telling duty nowadays, when traditional institutions and cultural capital have lost their authority? "Truth" and "intellectual" are certainly treated as synonymous, particularly such must speak the truth in the face of power (Foucault, 1977; Bourdieu, 1989; Chomsky, 1967; Said, 1993). Therefore the fact-sharing responsibility intellectuals bear has become even more vital to societies, seeing the widespread post-truth, populist condition. Most authors cited until now did not specify their role in society; better yet, their regime of truth through sociological analysis made it implicit. Laclau and Mouffe have been opposing right-wing populism far before it became Western mainstream culture, Urbinati has reacted to Italy's recent populist emergence by increasingly criticizing such in her publications, Müller addresses this phenomenon through the emphasis of the "people's" empty meaning. These intellectuals extend their literary political struggle further to the public realm by participating in debates (Urbinati, 2018; Müller, 2017; Mouffe, 2019). Similarly, Italian newspapers are proving they still own a privileged position that cannot be silenced. After Di Maio's attack on Gruppo Gedi, the established newspaper *Corriere* announced its solidarity by denouncing the Minister's "attack on pluralism and freedom of information...rights for everyone, which must always be defended, against those who maybe want a world of information with a single, complaisant voice" (2018). As opposed to being "the voice of the voiceless" (Chomsky, 2011), *Corriere*, *L'Espresso*, *Repubblica* – Italy's prominent media sources - want to be the voice of the once-dominant pluralist, truthful voice. It was the notions of the cheated, "silent majority" which elected the populist Italian leaders; those who did not feel represented by the liberal ruling elite. This thesis is a testament to many liberal, specific intellectuals who understand their role as that of persuaders joining in a political struggle. All intellectuals have the choice of joining or countering the common view, nonetheless must recognize the responsibility that

comes with their professional category. Bobbio agrees on this category's duty, however does not assume intellectuals have answers; he believes such must solicit their interlocutors to ask questions (1993). "Knowledge production is an on-going conversation, always crawling towards better truths, better understandings, but rarely arriving at a final complete shared conclusion" (Grossberg, 2017:9). Grossberg's antidote to the crises of knowledge is academics' fight to prevent information from becoming a mere political conflation, and the responsibility to teach students open-mindedness, whilst Chomsky thinks intellectuals must be the critical ones. "Rather than negation and antagonism" in a world where every fact is polarized "critique might become agonistic, seeking forms of conflict that are productive" (2017:38).

## **2.5 – The Role of Cultural Institutions**

"How can cultural projects produce meaning during the crisis of the expert and intellectual tradition that has given neoliberalism its legitimacy?" (Moreno-Caballud, 2015:273) Whilst intellectuals' role analysis has a quasi-centennial history, the political potential of cultural institutions started concerning debate recently. Institutions, generally, are artificial constraints that structure economic, social and political interaction, both formal as property rights and laws, and informal as traditions and taboos (North, 1991). A cultural institution can be intended as a pattern of social behaviour, or more commonly as a sphere concerning the social organization of cultural goods' production, distribution, mediation and reception (Hanson, 1975). "Cultural artifacts and activities that satisfy a need can be defined as goods and services that yield a specific benefit that derives from a number of functions as education, political representation and entertainment" (Hasitschk et al., 2005:5). Carr's outlining of cultural institutions' promise is regarded as significant to this paper (2003). A promise exists in the future and it is a free expression of will, similar to a gift. "Cultural institutions are places created to preserve objects and texts, to expand the boundaries of public knowledge associated with those artifacts and words, and to open the possibilities of learning" (2003:xiii). Upon the definition of such places, Carr looks for the presence of a collection as that of fine art, artifacts and books, accessible to the public; an organized, continuous structure of knowledge, as a historical narrative; information, thought-based empirical observations and documents which record multiple contexts and implications.

A connection to the public sphere is vital to cultural institutions' functioning, which are at times public institutions. These public dimensions include local, regional and national governments, as well as NGOs and not-for-profit sectors, which have greatly increased in the past decades. Public institutions facilitate economic activities - as taxes - and moral valuing, such as the promotion of consensus notions, typically referring to corporate culture (Pratt, 2006). Cultural institutions, both private and public, are often perceived as part of the State's coercive apparatus. Museums were conceived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as means of public education, yet ever since culture became less controlled by the clericals its association to the markets has grown. The firsts' emergence cannot be distanced from the rise of the bourgeoisie (Hasitschk et al., 2005). Starting in the 1980s arts and culture have played a fundamental role in "symbolic democratization": the expression of the State's equity priority through the exhibition of the "people's patrimony". In fact democracy's key concepts as suffrage and representation are typical themes promoted through culture. De-industrialization caused the disenfranchisement of the traditional labouring class' majority, at which point the European left employed culture as a vehicle to counter the scepticism surrounding social solidarity (Šešić & Vickery, 2018). Šešić and Vickery assert cultural autonomy has become a rarity as in this said period cultural institutions became dependent on cooperation with public policies: "participation" and "social inclusion" are strategic terms for institutions to receive funds. "Cultural value" is now almost entirely abstracted from the social and material conditions of cultural labour given cultural policies are hegemonic instruments. They critically understand cultural institutions as neoliberal machines that act either ideologically or by creating social capital through employment, wellbeing and education; such organizations have remained politically ineffective in response to its visitors' shift to consumers within retail spaces.

Even though cultural institutions' dependence on public funds is clear, one disagrees with Šešić & Vickery that such and institutions' moral valuing have "eclipsed their participation in a putative public sphere" (2018:11). Excellence in cultural institutions is solely achieved through constant public engagement (Carr, 2003). "These institutions determine the formation of cultural goods and their transformation into commodities, appreciated objects, symbols of collective identities, and as integrated parts of the public space" (Hasitschk et al., 2005:11). It is reductive to deem cultural

institutions mere vehicles of neoliberal hegemony, which have lost their symbolic and material power. Milton Friedman argued resources should be allocated to places that are more societally beneficial than public, governmental institutions (1993). The economist ignored the societal need for culture deriving from its everyday life representational, entertainment and teaching capabilities.

Populism's nemesis, elitism, is often regarded as a distinctive trait of cultural institutions. Carr notes such public spaces can defeat elitism's barriers that discourage learners, yet a socio-cultural inclusion tension is typically noticed in cultural communities (Hasitschk et al., 2005). "Culture and arts find themselves vulnerable in the face of populism insofar as they are inevitably associated with historical institutions, and are heavily mediated by a range of complex discourses, which in turn demand education, dialogue and a confrontation with forms of meaning not easily established" (Šešić & Vickery, 2018:10). Despite the well-known public educational role of heritage, culture remains associated to the elite given this group's greater consumption of such (Bourdieu, 1984). Within a prevalent anti-establishment context, the elite-culture duality has been exacerbated and cultural institutions have come under further fire. Shils holds that populism is a cultural as opposed to political issue, concerning the public dimension in relation to the institutional one (1996; Anselmi, 2018). This cultural problem is understood as the delegitimizing tendency of any established institutional order, specifically academic and scientific ones. Shils exemplifies a populist mentality through America's traditional public dimension's prevalence – possibly originating from its distrust for aristocracy's hierarchy – and consequent weak institutional identity. Furthermore, the public sphere gradually opened up to bottom-up possibilities (Habermas, 1962): the foundations for cultural populism were set partly by such possibilities becoming an opposition in tension with top-down culture (School of Frankfurt). Research and intellectual work by institutions are seen as an elite manipulation adverse to popular culture hence awaken heightened distrust and resentment today. Institutions' cultural mediation in contemporary democracies is suffering a profound crisis due to populism's cultural polarization (Anselmi, 2018). Populism cancels intermediate cultural positions, discourages articulated debate and prefers dichotomies and simplification. Culture however requires dialogue, theoretical reflection, questioning of social norms and willingness to experience the challenging of one's sensory reflexes. These pre-conditions are in

tension with those who perceive reality as divided into for-the-people and against-the-people camps, where all information must be rationalized politically (Šešić & Vickery, 2018).

For Šešić and Vickery cultural institutions are losing however have not lost to populism, thus call for a collective intellectual project through art research practices and critical reflection. Art today is a quasi-academic enquiry involving publishing, collaborating, analysing, psychology, education, research and criticizing: the marriage between research and art can challenge dominant views and produce alternative narratives which have been excluded from the historical canon (Power, 2018). Art has a political potential deriving from its openness, it is the 21<sup>st</sup> century factory meeting alternative. In today's bewildered post-truth of damaging images and fake news, art "has an obligation to thought" (2018:24). Carr wrote before the economic crash yet predicted both learners and professionals' future would soon become complex and fragmentary (2003). Within insecurity, cultural institutions bear responsibility to function as places of reflection that nurture change. Whilst Carr understands disconnection, assumptions and certainty as enemies of learning, he is certain a "culture of enquiry" drives the cultural environment, as opposed to commercialism, inviting visitors to enter and think without the purchase of anything other than the ticket (2003). Thus the literature on cultural institutions' role disagrees on the corporate nature of such, however recognizes these places' informing, educational duty. Perceived elitism and dichotomous thinking extend the traditional knowledge producers' crisis of authority to cultural institutions, nonetheless these spaces epitomize today's rarest creature: truth. Our knowledge is multidisciplinary, such as the layering of distinct disciplines that remain within their borders. The promise of cultural institutions goes further such and aims for the mapping of interdisciplinarity: the differences intrinsic to the human condition are explored through the meeting and fusing of epistemological complexities (2003). Again, culture's almost infinite definitions derive from its complex nature. Cultural institutions strive to explain different pasts, different paths, different ways of understanding the future through numerous disciplines. An artistic exhibition, for example, will solely benefit from a historical and geographical contextualization. "The issue is not how to 'accurately represent the other' but how to comparatively relate one's own cultural framework inter-subjectively" (Gregos, 2018:34). Pluralism is the sole antidote to democracy's

extremist deviation (Shills, 1996). The promise is that visitors will renegotiate, alone or jointly, their own culture's view and open up to the possibilities of producing new truths about oneself and others (Carr, 2003).

Cultural institutions are both regarded as agents of elitism and means to overcome such. Carr notes all structures of common memory, public voices and cultural institutions are the sole place where a mindful experience can happen for everyone; these places were thought for the "crafting of truth by ordinary people" (2003:158). Italy's former Minister of Culture, Franceschini, promoted free Sunday entries in all Italian public museums, each first weekend of the month. This had extraordinary results for Italians and tourists' cultural consumption: the total yearly entries grew from 40.7 million to 50.1 million between 2014 and 2017 (Mibac, 2017). In 2017 public museums' yearly income grew by 11.7% and 3.5 million visitors were registered on free Sundays (2017). Franceschini attributed the cultural interest growth on Sundays to the novel initiative, to a more efficient employment of European funds and a significant increment in public funds' spending by the Ministry (Federculture 1. R., 2017). The Government of Change, as its name goes, then cancelled this initiative by noting it devalued the national heritage. The current Minister, Bonisoli, noted Pompei would appear to lose prestige in tourists' eyes, upon free entry (Corriere, 2018). Italy's heritage most certainly demands greater valorisation (and management) given the sheer quantity the country holds, yet the statistics hinted precisely to such. An exponential increase in museums' entries entails educational, representational, entertainment and monetary returns as well as cultural visibility. Populism's witch-hunt, institutions' persecution (medical, cultural, European), is indisputable hence "cultural and artistic institutions have a pivotal role in the critique of the contemporary grammar and semantics, but also in the search of new codes that encourage dialogue to overcome binary discourse" (Santos & Cachola, 2018: 1). Truth and conviviality can only arise through conflict (Grossberg, 2017; Santos & Cachola, 2018).

The Lega-MS5 coalition has never outspokenly criticized culture, nonetheless their cancelling of passed initiatives functions as a political strategy, which in turn causes the devaluing of culture they allegedly denounce. After the Bataclan's terroristic attack, Renzi announced the establishment of a *Bonus Cultura* for all 18 year olds,

both to encourage greater cultural interest and as “each euro invested in security should be equalled in one for culture...the response to terror cannot solely be securitarian” (Forbes, 2017). Just as populism cannot be analysed solely politically, terrorism must be tackled physically and ideologically. It allowed 18 year olds to spend 500 euros on books, cinema, theatre, courses and national parks: Minister Boschi noted the country would be wealthier each time someone entered a book store thanks to such (2017). 61% of those entitled made use of the bonus (Agi, 2017). By drawing parallels between economic wealth to literary consumption, it appears as though the Renzi Government perceived culture and capital as equivalent. The initiative certainly had its flaws as it became known that some exchanged it for cash, but the fact that 39% of adolescents did not use the Bonus is far graver; it points to a youth section which is culturally inactive, or unaware of the Bonus (2017). Bonisoli announced App18 would not be renovated as “culture is a (long-term) investment, not an electoral allowance, a propagandistic move” (AgCult, 2018). While recognizing the importance of adolescents’ cultural capital, he paradoxically hints to Renzi’s clientelism through the offering of the Bonus. Let us not forget the M5S’s warhorse: citizens’ income. Is Bonisoli acting as a post-modern individual whose emotional gains are defeating his rational critique? The current Minister of Culture delegitimizes the past legislature through this political move and penalizes youth’s culture in the process. Again, populist do not strive for an educated citizenry.

Cultural institutions’ interdisciplinary ethos finds itself in a rigid tension with simplification and dichotomies, thus such must oppose these phenomena to guarantee their epistemological pursuit. The statistics however portray a hopeful future for such institutions in Italy: the yearly museum entries gain further relevance when proposing that culture cannot be politicized as easily as science. The boom in museum entries took place during the key years for Italy’s emerging populism. Federculture 14<sup>th</sup> Report underlines that Italians’ cultural spending, including cinemas, concerts, museums and theatres, rised by 3.1% in 2017 (2018). Italians’ increasingly frequent cultural participation therefore goes further than museum visits. Anti-establishment sentiments, and cultural institutions’ longstanding association to the elite therefore did not prevent Italians from appreciating Franceschini’s initiative nor do these sentiments seem to be correlated to cultural inactivity. The Colosseum, Pompei and the Uffizi respectively received the most visitors in 2017 and directly benefitted from

free Sunday's visibility (Mibac, 2017). Whilst one could write a thesis just on this occurrence, one for now will propose the concurrent growing populism and visiting of the country's iconic heritage results from Italy's national identity winning over the us-against-the-elite ethos. "National heritage is at the centre of the question, and it is the property of all the citizens' of the Republic" (Corriere, 2018). Carr mentions cultural institutions' interdisciplinary emphasis on differing voices as well as common memory, and one believes these spaces' anti-exclusion agency derives from such. Culture is defined by its public dimension and epistemological role. Whilst humans innately divide night and day, "pure people" against "corrupt people's culture" is a tough political illusion to establish. It is easier for populists to portray a common, establishment enemy in Renzi's compulsory vaccines, rather than in Pompei's elegance. Not only do cultural institutions have a responsibility to employ their educational calling against the crises of knowledge, they truly have the political potential in Italy to defeat this cultural disease of simplification through their ordinary people's appeal and heightened consumption. Luckily Italy's cultural activity was independent from Renzi's lost referendum. Cultural institutions' must promote their enquiry culture, as their gift is to "create sustained conditions for intellectual risk" (Carr, 2003:166). After this chapter's "state-of-the-art" analysis, the second part of the research will commence, through the critical outline of Fondazione Feltrinelli's response to the predominant populist trait.

### **Chapter 3: *Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli***

The Italian peninsula's landscape of cultural institutions is a prosperous one: its museums and exhibitory spaces alone amount to 4976 (ISTAT, 2016). Italy is unique for its 88 banking foundations, established by the said institutions, whilst its 37 community foundations are based on an American model that connects the representatives of a local community through a common aim: increasing the quality of life (Non Profit, 2019). The most common foundation is the enterprise and family one, given there are more than a 100 (2019). The President of Associazione Istituti di Cultura Italiani (AICI) recently noted "the institutes which are strongly linked to the history of Italian political culture have prevented...the disappearance of references to great ideals, cultural strands and celebrated characters which founded our democratic Republic" (Fondazione Basso, 2019). This paper is precisely focused on such cultural institutions, foundations and institutes, which place political engagement at their core. The reason for Fondazione Feltrinelli's initial analysis and subsequent comparison to 3 cultural institutions originates from the former institution's prolific work and self-definition. More so than all the other entities considered, Fondazione Feltrinelli underlines its multifaceted role and clearly states the approaches it adopts. This explicit description facilitates the outlining of the scopes of the other cultural institutions, at times implicit. Further, the overview of Feltrinelli's extensive work is woven together with the analysis of key notions such as Mouffe's *agonistic politics* (2013), whose complexity is untangled and illustrated by Fondazione's study. Once these concepts have been thoroughly observed through Fondazione's scope, context and perspective concerning the Italian cultural landscape are provided via a comparative chapter of other prominent cultural hubs. Chapter 3 and 4 therefore mutually enrich one another.

### 3.1 - Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli and its self-proclaimed role



**Figure 6: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli**

(Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019)

Giangiaco Feltrinelli was born in 1926 into one of Italy's wealthiest families, its fortunes originating among others from timber trading - supplying half of the world with wood by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century -, a bank under the family name and real estate investments (Feltrinelli C., 1999). Giangiacomo struck a deal with his mother during his studies: once he graduated from high school he was free to enrol in the struggle against the Germans. He enrolled in the Legnano combat unit in November 1944 and a year later joined the Communist Party (PCI). Whilst Giangiacomo had just started his journey as a comrade, his family was openly pro-monarchy during Italy's 1946 Referendum and thus ashamed of his political likings (Feltrinelli C., 1999). Yet, Giangiacomo was the sole male heir and decided to use his family's wealth to document a story not often told back then: he created a library documenting the history of international working class movements, which later became an Institute and subsequently Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. In 1955 Feltrinelli Publishing was also born (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). It is only with this tale in mind that one can grasp Fondazione Feltrinelli today and its leftist historical narrative. The archival patrimony is one of economic, political and historical nature and no longer collects documents solely linked to the working classes. It now holds 1.5 million pieces, including volumes, newspapers and posters, among which the first editions of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867) and Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516).

In 2016 Fondazione's headquarters found a new home in Viale Pasubio 5, Milan, in a building envisioned by Herzog & de Meuron (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). The institution aimed to expand its scope as a cultural centre through the novel space: it currently conceives itself as a national laboratory for cultural programs, with an international outlook. All cultural manifestations respond as much as they are responded to (Bal, 2013). Far from eclipsing the public sphere (Šešić & Vickery, 2018), Fondazione is a non-profit institution that strives to function as a cultural meeting point for Milan's community, while collaborating with local cultural institutions and associations (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). Fondazione Feltrinelli's archive is at the heart of most of its initiatives: the "supply chain" typically follows the patrimony-research-education-divulgence and publication macro sequence, and includes performative arts. The research mostly originates from the patrimony and is divulged through lectures, publications, exhibitions, forums, workshops and

didactical laboratories. This community space also hosts film viewings, live music and interactive art. With the exception of a minority of paid musical and didactical events, as well as the masters courses, anyone regardless of age and nationality can take part freely in Fondazione's initiatives, access its publications online or watch its lectures live on social media. Further, the *Sala Lettura* on the last floor is open 6 days a week and acts as a library. Carr looks for the presence of artistic or literary collections, their preservation and the resulting expansion of public knowledge through such when distinguishing cultural institutions (2003). This definition significantly fits the Foundation's ethos, as the patrimony is both included in the free activities and can be visited by the public – together with the main building - and consulted.

The areas of research tackled by Fondazione are divided into four thematic realms:

- “Political Innovation: Observatory on Democracy” - analyses the redefinition of democracy, representation and political communication given the strong political, economic, social and technological contemporary pressures such experience.
- “Cities and Citizenship: Observatory on Cities and Urban Transformations” – outlines the socio-historical transformation which have taken place in the past century, and still affect European cities today. The analysis of recurring phenomena can allow for the conception of novel conscious citizenship practices.
- “Globalization and Sustainability: Observatory on Ideas and Practices for a Sustainable Future” – researches the actions and practices connected to the production, distribution and consumption of resources while considering the environmental, social and economic impact such foster.
- “Work's Future: Jobless Society Platform” – promotes a reflection on the growingly fluid, unstable labour market, as the relation between work and society is severely modified by technological innovation.

As explored later, the topics tackled by this institution cross its thematic areas transversally. Given Fondazione Feltrinelli's focus on sociological phenomena - and as mentioned in the educational component of the patrimonial supply chain - in 2014 it established an Educational branch which recognizes the quick shift in societies, reflected in the changing labour market. It promotes life-long learning, soft skills, empowerment and capacity-building. While Fondazione is a greatly versatile and prolific institution, the scope of this thesis will mostly include the analysis of its opposition to the prevalent populist phenomena. The outlining will be discussed through cultural institutions as well as intellectuals' role lens. Both are endowed with the calling for knowledge production: intellectuals are individuals that bear the same truth-telling, epistemological responsibility as cultural institutions. Not only do they share the same duty, these spaces and privileged professionals often meet. This case study's institution functions intellectually by publishing its own research in books and articles, while its keynote speakers' findings are typically disseminated after their presentations. This community space in fact publishes materials generated by its researchers, project managers as well as those of experts external to the Foundation, some of which hold lectures here. The latter guests or collaborators are representatives of institutions (cultural and non-), the third sector, community practices and civil society. The role of cultural institutions and intellectuals becomes one is this paper, not solely given their close nature, rather as intellectualism is intrinsic to Fondazione's daily functioning.

The discussing of Fondazione Feltrinelli's role will be firstly considered through its own definition and in the later sub-chapters through an overview of its cultural action regarding Italy's populist wave. Carr underlines cultural institutions' responsibility to foster thinking through the recording of multiple contexts and implications, similarly to Grossberg who perceives dialogue as the ultimate knowledge-producing activity, where agonistic views can elicit forms that are productive (2003; 2017). Together with these already noted theories, Mouffe's agonistic politics will be the guiding framework throughout the chapter, which were inspired by Gramsci's egemonia. "What is at a given moment accepted as the 'natural' order, jointly with the common-sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices. It is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity" (2013:2). Each social order is the product of numerous practices whose aim is to establish a structure in a context of contingency.

Mouffe refuses the Universalist approach that postulates Western modernity as morally superior, given one of liberalism's main tenants is the availability of a universal consensus originating from reason. We must abandon the search for a quintessentially harmonious society and consensus without exclusion. The common liberal outlining of pluralism presupposes that we inhabit a world with several values, yet an empirical limitation prevents us from adopting all of such; if they are brought together however, a harmonious ensemble arises. Habermas notes that consensus can be reached in the public sphere, nonetheless fails to see consensus' hegemonic component: there is no society devoid of power relations (1962; Mouffe, 2013). The former, liberal perspective negates politics' essential antagonistic dimension, given each order is susceptible to counter-hegemonic practices' challenging. Liberal thought is also constituted by individualism in Mouffe's opinion, thus "cannot recognize that there can only be an identity when it is constructed as difference and that any social objectivity is constituted through acts of power" (2013:4). To recognize radical negativity entails the acknowledgment of the people as divided and multiple: it is the very agreement that difference is a precondition for each identity's existence which allows one to grasp why politics – which deals with collective identities – is characterized by the constitution of a "we", whose demarcation is born from a "they". Within Mouffe's "agonistic pluralism" frame, democratic politics in fact have the pivotal task of creating the institutions that will foster debate, where conflicting consensus arises among opponents rather than enemies (2013). Antagonism and agonism go together: "passions" are integral to politics and importantly, conflict must take the form of agonism over antagonism, a struggle between adversaries. Whilst an antagonistic us-them distinction is cardinal in politics, adversaries' battles focus on their ideals' gaining of hegemony, nonetheless do not question the legitimacy of others' right to fight for their opinion. Mouffe relates the growing disaffection with political participation to lacking confrontation, thus proposes society's need for dialogue concerning alternatives (2013). No order should be presented as the sole legitimate one, as Mouffe hopes to initiate the challenging of the neoliberal order through agonistic debate.

This thesis' link to such agonistic theory derives from Mouffe's perception (inspired by Gramsci's organic countering) of the cultural domain as occupying a central space in the development of the common-sense, as this realm is fundamental in the

construction of counter-hegemonic practices. In regards to contemporary Italy, this notion presupposes the challenging of the populist governmental order. Firstly Fondazione is in agreement with the author that democracy and politics are not a minority's question (Tarantino, *Lo Stato di Salute della Democrazia di Oggi*, 2018; Mouffe, 2013). Massimiliano Tarantino, the Secretary General, described the current global political moment as a historical one where the flattening of the past on the present appears to prevail: far from an anachronistic cost, archives have an opportunity to overturn such disastrous politics. Tarantino understands this cultural institution as bearing a role, arisen from its conservation and research identity, to become decisive in the imagining of a future characterized by what should constitute as the common sense: rights' valuing, conviviality and tolerance (IALHI, 2018). Fondazione identifies its enemies through society's dividing, unjust ills as xenophobia, loss of the rights that seemed to have been won timelessly and polarization (IALHI, 2018; '900, *La Stagione dei Diritti*, 2018). The institution opposes anti-democratic forces as demagoguery, souverainism and nationalism, deeming populism as one of the most significant challenges to representative democracy (Feltrinelli C. 2018; Tarantino, *Lo Stato di Salute della Democrazia di Oggi*, 2018). Whilst the institution recognizes as its enemies the phenomena that hinder conviviality - a uniting community or shared space of existence – as radicalization, it posits that the demonization of such prevents the understanding of the consensus it generates, similarly to Mouffe (Fischer, 2007; *Lo Stato di Salute della Democrazia di Oggi*, 2018; '900, *La Stagione dei Diritti*, 2018). In fact Fondazione initiates agonistic discussions as the President of Fondazione specified “we truly invite everyone to our table, as we are convinced that without a collective and shared investigation on the present, it is impossible...to face the future positively” (Feltrinelli C., 2018). The hope is for contemporary debate to originate accurate and secular knowledge, and critical thinking to develop through citizens and consequently adversaries' encounter. Opposing views are not treated as enemies' illegitimate opinions, as the Foundation acknowledges a pluralistic polyphony of voices.

Grossberg's debate epistemological capabilities are shared by the Foundation, as the President identifies three specific means for the not-for-profit institution to fight today's political horrors: to study, communicate and share (Feltrinelli C., 2018). The engagement of the public sphere is presupposed in such actions. A pivotal aspect of

Fondazione's role in facing democracy's challenges is to create novel dialogue possibilities between institutions and citizens, closing the gap between such (Tarantino, *Lo Stato di Salute della Democrazia di Oggi*, 2018). Conviviality should also emerge through the institution's battling of another enemy, the often elitist and fragmented nature of cultural consumption, by striving to reach a wider crowd (Stagione Ribelle, 2017). The Foundation perceives its responsibility as primarily concerning the emphasis of historians' role: to unite as opposed to divide through free archival dissemination - through the digital ecosystem -, to identify indispensable research contributions and their breaking points through historical comparative approaches (IALHI, 2018). The enacting of this cultural institution's educational duty requires interdisciplinarity, through the reaching of a virtuous equilibrium between dissemination and the scientific rigour of historical approaches (IALHI, 2018). Moreover, this community hub follows a freedom of research ethos and adopts the common view that truth entails the confrontation with the ruling power (IALHI, 2018; Foucault, 1977; Bourdieu, 1989; Chomsky, 1967; Said, 1993). Speaking the truth to power is interpreted as the responsibility to honesty, or regime of truth, especially when entering the political realm. Far from promoting the hegemonic order's ideals, the Lega-M5S values, the Foundation acknowledges the value of antagonistic challenges to the dominant ideology. Whilst political difference is not discredited, populism is commonly challenged in Fondazione's initiatives. Within an agonistic frame, Fondazione outlines contemporary left as well as right politics. By representing both political camps, and allowing the public to access materials often ignored, the hub strives to aid citizens in reaching an informed, documented opinion. Whilst denouncing xenophobic sentiments and totalitarianism, "which horror and frighten us" (Feltrinelli C., 2018), by noting an "us-them" rhetoric, Fondazione ultimately strives to be a service to citizens, so to ameliorate their future, rather than building counter-hegemonic practices ('900, *La Stagione dei Diritti*, 2018).

At a moment in time when the world is heading towards profound political change, and has witnessed dramatic economic shifts, Fondazione yearns to initiate social change. It is moved both by civic sense and what it perceives as cultural institutions' duty: to have a true rather than symbolic role, by enriching citizens with the tools to navigate an unprecedented, complex present. This institution promises to follow a "culture of enquiry" (Carr, 2003). Agonistic dialogue, research, truth,

interdisciplinarity, references to the past, free promulgation are vital to the creation of a “polyphony of opinions” (IALHI, 2018) which must represent citizens of all ages, to build bridges between individuals, institutions and between each other. Therefore Fondazione Feltrinelli within times of uncertainty and emerging populism defines its role as a social, political and educational cultural institution guided by a research predisposition and with the objective of laying the hopes for a greater future. Archives share intellectuals’ key characteristic: opportunity.

My internship experience in Fondazione Feltrinelli commenced in September 2018 and ended in January 2019; such case study was fundamental with regards to this report’s Culture Studies framing. In fact Fondazione’s outline and comparison to the landscape sheds light on cultural institutions’ central positioning in the cultural domain given their construction of counter-hegemonic practices, through the exercise of the opportunity located within their privileged position (Mouffe, 2013; Chomsky, 2011). The bewilderment caused by the crises of knowledge is tackled in the conceptual frame, linked to populism in Italian institutions’ intellectualism and opposed by their scopes (Grossberg, 2017). In terms of my activities, I started by working in the Programming and Production area, where I would curate events’ details as the set up of the room, the catering and porters’ timings, coordinating the guest speakers’ wishes with those of the project managers and supporting the running of the event itself. Within a few weeks however I was incorporated in the Foundation’s thematic areas. I supported a benchmarking activity where I analysed Italian institutions’ cultural management formation courses, and searched for possible granting centres, which was essential to this thesis’ comparative chapter. I collaborated with 2 video-makers in the production of Fondazione’s videos, as Stagione Capitale’s introductory one; story-telling, conciseness and semiotic images are vital to the production of videos and the crowd’s enticement. A task that remained unchanged throughout my experience was that of translating English and Italian texts. Based on the coming initiative’s topic, I scouted for specific contacts to invite via email as the public, among organizations and universities’ sites. The initiative I was lucky enough follow the most was linked to the Cities and Citizenship area, “Atlas of Cities”: I invited speakers, artists and curated the distinct promotional materials required by the Communication team. Through its 6 appointments, the cycle of events compared 12 cities thanks to notions as safety, happiness and formality. The virtue I

believe is paramount to students' work, the ability to solely concentrate on one project until it is complete, must be forgotten in a working environment. Here, the mastery of multitasking is key.

### **3.2 – Fondazione Feltrinelli's educational role (or political blindness)?**

Fondazione Feltrinelli 2017-2018's *Stagione Ribelle*, season of events, condemned elitist culture and called for "rebels", which it defines as distant from the common perception of lonely individuals moving in opposite directions; such today are those whose priority is community-thinking and who are curious hence listen and grasp differing opinions' significant notions (2017). Stagione Ribelle aimed to engage citizens, focusing its cultural initiatives on themes as labour, globalization, politics and social transformations. Following rebels' valuing of opposing visions, its confrontational space role and with a disoriented society in mind, Fondazione envisioned the cycle of events "What is left/ what is right" for Italy's March 2018 upcoming elections. Whilst reiterating the counter-hegemonic ideals it opposes by asking "is it possible to contrast the waves of insecurity and intolerance?" (What is left, what is right, 2017), the institution invited both left and right thinkers to question whether such political distinctions are still relevant. The Foundation recognizes Europe's future is stuck between two ills, hate and inequality, and acknowledges the blurring of the left-right dichotomy: "left and right are categories still greatly utilized for guidance in public debate...yet are not always exhaustive in the drawing of lines of fracture and juxtaposition on critical political themes...Are they still useful terms when interpreting the novel political phenomena?" (Nè di destra nè di sinistra?, 2018) Despite Fondazione's famous leftist roots and remarked opposition to intolerance, such cycle initiated controversy among the intellectual community. Fondazione's hope was a two-sided one: to encourage the public to vote (it started a hashtag #IamthereforeIvote to facilitate this wish) and insure that its vote was an informed one, through the confrontation of differing political ideologies. The voting aid emerged from the cultural centre's self-declared epistemological predisposition. Althusser argues education is among the most potent *Ideological State Apparatuses* - which mirror the understanding of cultural institutions' functioning as neoliberal machines - given they perpetuate the State's repressive ways through a specialized

apparatus (1971; Šešić & Vickery, 2018; Pratt, 2006). The ruling classes ensure their domination over the working classes through these apparatuses' reproduction of the relations of production. Althusser understands the educational system as a powerful State apparatus, given it is the sole compulsory one and teaches the ruling class' ideology in its pure state, philosophy and ethics for example, when a child is most vulnerable (Althusser, 1971). Bennet argues for a less politically charged educational scope (1998). Education acts as a technology within the cultural field, as its technological component implies its continuous reform process to reflect society's ways, and its complex operational realities are a cultural process of mediation (Chan & Hui, 2011). *Vermittlung*, "mediation" in German, means the transfer from one party to the next, the pragmatic transmission of a message, as well as the attempt to reconcile two conflicting parties (Lind, 2012). "What is left/what is right" exemplifies Fondazione's recognition of both left and right agonistic views: far from solely legitimating the populist ruling class' values by brainwashing children, it arbitrates, mediates conflicting views for young-adults and adults acquisition of contemporary information.

Before delving into the intellectual backlash originated by the said initiative, one will briefly mention this institution's outlining of fascism and populism, to portray the informational role and historical references it provides. Giangiacomo's militant antifascism has remained a recurrent, now intellectual constant among the Foundation's priorities. The 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2019 was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Fasci di combattimento*'s founding, a movement destined to become Mussolini's regime, in one of Milan's most central squares: Piazza San Sepolcro. Despite the fact Milan's Prefect had cancelled *CasaPound*'s meeting to celebrate such recurrence, 2000 supporters of such extreme right movement held a meeting-concert in the city's outskirts welcoming the band *ZetaZeroAlfa* with roman salutes (Repubblica, 2019). Italy finds itself in an alarming context where a League politician admits to being a fascist after being called so on stage (Video.Repubblica, 2019), whilst the journalist Gad Lerner calmly reaffirmed being Jewish after another anniversary extreme right meeting by *Forza Nuova* shouted such religious label (ANSA, 2019). "Jew" and "fascist" were employed offensively. The former sheds light on Italy's persisting anti-Semitism while the League politician's accepting of such name tellingly illuminates the normalization of fascism. "If fascism means being in favour of the people, than I

am a fascist” (Video.Repubblica, 2019). “Fascism-never-again” (#*maipiùfascismo*) is a motto promoted by Fondazione, where the significant date was marked by the revealing of a capital letters art installation on the institution’s building with such maxim, and the publishing of *In presa diretta: la costruzione del fascismo raccontata in tempo reale (1919-1925)* (Masini, Troglio, Panaino, & Perazzoli, 2019); the book reports Mussolini’s slow rise aided by severe class and generational divides. Historical parallels to the present were in fact drawn throughout Fondazione’s day events. The Secretary General both presented this commemoration and published an article on an external newspaper by specifying how the Fasci introduced themselves initially as a leftist revolutionary movement able to radically reform the economy and society; however only the old-against-new opposition remained in this shifting ideology and many of the founders themselves then endorsed antifascist struggles (Huffington Post, 2019). Tarantino later noted “history does not repeat itself, perhaps it rhymes, yet it is the people who make the difference, through their passions and perseverance” (2019). The commemoration certainly served to remind citizens of what Fondazione understands to be a present-day communal priority, as this cultural centre leads a daily battle against fascism through its remembering.

*Il fascismo in tempo reale* was a joint research and publication led in 2015 by Fondazione, which told the genesis of such movement throughout Europe (Bidussa & Vacca, 2015). The educational opportunity held by archives recently appeared through Fondazione’s publishing of an excerpt which reads “it would be enough for each Italian, posing his conscience a question that even fascism cannot prevent, asked himself what race he is...for the ‘purity of the antique blood’ proclaimed by the Minister of Culture to gain an absurd appearance. Citizen of big harbours which are the living communities of all people, farmer of the south from which many emigrated only to come back Africanized, Americanized, Europeanized, citizen of those islands inhabited by diverse civilizations and captured by pirates of all coasts...all Italians carry within them the traces of the ‘races’ of the four cardinal directions” (Gianfranchi, 1938; Fondazione Feltrinelli, Masini, 2018). An excerpt from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also shared in 2019 to emphasize how French, German, Italian antifascist struggles should not be distinguished: “they are all one persistent moral, civil cause regarding freedom, enacted in the name of conscience” (Rosselli, 1997; Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2018). Antifascism has been both promoted and questioned

through multiple opinions, given the sharing of a researcher's article condemning *a priori* antifascism. Antifascism will only take place once Italians admit they have been and still are fascist. Raimo argues antifascism cannot be enacted until the acknowledgment of the reasons for contemporary fascism in Italy (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2018).

The populist question has been tackled by Fondazione through its deepening, discussing and often critique. A 2016 article noted how Clinton referenced experts' backing of her economic programme whilst Trump accused her of being an establishment insider. This confrontation hints to the technocracy vs. populism debate, and the author believed it would have been a mistake to perceive Europe as immune to such axis (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Invernizzi, 2016). One of Johnson's decisive comments on Brexit's Leave campaign was "people are sick of experts", similarly Invernizzi here pointed to Italy's growing popular discontent towards the ruling elite and Five Star's technical competency claims. Given the beginning of populism's global emergence, Fondazione started defining such through its people-against-the-elite dichotomy, claimed representation of people through the awakening of emotionality and distinction from popularity through personalization and spectacularization styles - centered on provocations (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Biancalana, 2016). "What is left/what is right's" main task is to grasp whether these political distinctions matter nowadays, a topic which has been commonly linked to populism within Fondazione's literature. The book *Destra* voiced Manin's initial hypothesis that the defeat of alternatives to liberal-democracy caused among average voters a perpetual state of doom in the centre, undecided between left and right (1997; Puttini & Fumagalli, 2018). Manin later recognized he had overestimated the erosion of parties' divisions: the silent majority has in fact found itself more willing to favour extremist movements since 2008, and the majority of contemporary populist movements are found on the right spectrum (2018). Fioravante's article on the other hand reported how the movement that received the most votes by those undecided between left and right, in France's 2017 elections, was Mèlenchon's *La France Insoumise* (eco-socialist) rather than the extreme-right Front National. Despite UKIP's<sup>6</sup> extraordinary win in 2015 in Margate (UK), two years later such extreme

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<sup>6</sup> United Kingdom Independence Party, which lead the Brexit Leave campaign.

right party lost 10,000 votes, and Labour doubled its consensus to 16.5 thousand (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2018). Fioravante quotes de Benoist as being accurate only to an extent when proposing the disappearance of left-right identities; rather than converging towards each other as the French author states, political camps have rarely been more divided (2018). This publication condemns the left as being stuck in old ideologies, unable to renew itself and act while fixating on an immaterial populist enemy. The only text identified which outlines a left-right convergence still points to the populist use of corruption accusations to give the illusion of difference among contemporary parties' (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Curini, 2018). Gerbaudo's writing instead asks for the end of populism's pejorative connotations, as left populism can truly fight societies' enemy, such as financial oligarchies, rather than the right's scapegoating of migrants (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2017). Gerbaudo notes it is the left's responsibility to cover the political vacuum resulting after the economic crisis, as opposed to the right's given it architected neoliberal policies. He deems left populism as the sole global alternative to Trump, Le Pen and Salvini's xenophobia (2017). The texts regarding populism disseminated by Fondazione Feltrinelli primarily critique such movements as drawing on emotionality and people vs. elite oppositions: such criticism climaxed with Anselmi's already cited publication, where populism is portrayed as representing democracy's epochal destruction (2018). Nonetheless, populism's tackling up to *Stagione Ribelle* does not feature its simplification or condemnation, rather analyses, critiques and distinct promotions of such are found, as are the differing arguments of the left-right convergence.

The cultural initiative that initiated intellectual backlash will now be discussed. Varoufakis, former Greek Minister of Finance of the Tsipras Government (the coalition of the radical left) and Pisapia, former Mayor of Milan (centre-left) were the first guests to take part in *What is left/ what is right*. The keynote speaker of the second event was Florian Philippot, director of Marine Le Pen's Presidential campaign and founder of the right-wing movement *Les Patriotes*, and that of the third was Paul Mason, journalist closely working with Corbyn's Labour Party. Alain de Benoist, writer, philosopher and founder of the rightist *Nouvelle Droite* movement was supposed to lecture in Fondazione in February, nonetheless the criticism initiated by the event made for its postponing to April, after the elections. It is significant that the relevance of the left-right distinction was posed to many politicians linked to new

radical parties, most of whom are close to, or who have been defined as populists: Le Pen, Varoufakis and Corbyn. On this occasion, a large group of academics studying far-right movements accused the institution of political blindness. An open letter to Fondazione's President and Scientific Committee was written; Albanese, University of Lisbon, Chollet, University of Lausanne and Bernini, University of Verona, were among the first researchers to sign such (Albanese et al., 2018). "We were surprised in discovering that your Foundation, which we admire for its democratic and antifascist effort, has invited two well-known representatives of the French far-right, de Benoist and Philippot...what the two French share is their "nativism", belief that nations should only be inhabited by natives...this discriminatory understanding of society contradicts democracy's pluralism" (2018). The letter acknowledges the need to take interest in rightist movements, however states that such cultural events entail serious political regression. Rather than breaking ideologically from Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National, Marine Le Pen Party's communication strategy is solely succeeding in its de-demonization. Philippot and de Benoist as well are not representatives of the new right, and the first's attendance contributes to the Front National's normalization strategy. Moreover, the placing of the events before the Italian elections worsened Fondazione's choice in the academics' eyes, given de Benoist inspires Italian far-right Lega and CasaPound supporters. The letter asked the cutting question: "nowadays, when...many seek protection in Europe, and others create a fertile ground for racism and xenophobia, do you think it is appropriate to emphasize the ideas which de Benoist and Philippot promulgate?" (2018).

Passions guide politics among diverse people. Fondazione after having repeated its intolerance for xenophobic sentiments - just as it recognizes difference among collective identities - it acknowledged the legitimacy of agonistic views. In response to the letter the Secretary General found it was necessary to outspokenly outline the purpose of such institution once again. "We respect your position however believe the peculiarity of our role...is that of contributing in the founding of future society. On the one hand emphasizing the roots of antifascism, which are greatly found in our patrimony and research, and on the other also promoting the meeting of different opinions and listening to opponents' beliefs, which act as the foundations of a truly democratic context" (Lettera43, 2018). Thus the formula adopted by the Foundation is confrontation over censorship and demonization. Significantly, whilst the majority of

the institution's efforts concern the promotion of antifascism, as recognized by the intellectuals, this is not its single aim. "The aim we have given our institution is... the promotion of plural confrontation and the creation of a space which does not follow one thesis, rather it is committed to the promotion of knowledge and information, key to critical thinking" (2018). Rather than promoting the ruling ideology in place before the March elections ( the technical left, PD, Gentiloni Government), the hub strives to represent contemporary society by inviting left and right notable politicians. Given the Foundation's educational role and acknowledging of opposing views and their agonistic right to fight for hegemony, which is constitutive of democracy, it trusts that dialogue between left and right will elicit informed votes. The productiveness of polyphonic voices' mediation and discussion materializes in critical thought.

Despite Fondazione Feltrinelli's public explanation of the institution's choice given its epistemological role, the appeal continued accumulating signatures by European intellectuals throughout February, who then shared it with the general public: 800 people signed the petition linked to the open letter (Change.org, 2018). This debate travelled beyond the letter's intellectuals; such professionals were not in agreement on the happenings. Repubblica advertised What is left/ what is right as an educational laboratory leading up the elections mapping the competing political families through the lecturing of different thinkers and political actors (2017). Further, it believed the institution perceived the coming elections not simply as a participatory tool, but as the symbol of a thoughtful choice as well. *Oltrelalinea* is a newspaper that distances itself from mass-media and harshly criticized the open letter as contradictory. The newspaper's journalist Vivaldelli thinks whoever – regardless of political views - has read de Benoist's work can agree he is not a "dangerous nazi" and can appreciate his intellectual prominence. In fact the French author's contributions on the left-right vanishing axis have already been mentioned in this paper. "The open letter, in the name of 'democracy', prevented a great thinker from taking part in a civil confrontation, negating pluralism...of which they are false prophets. This letter's contradiction justifies...an obnoxiously repressive act" (2018).

Intellectuals cannot always take it upon themselves to define their role in society: typically, they carry out such task through self-proclamation or their works, however the open letter was a rare example of intellectuals attempting to define other

colleagues' duty. The letter urged Fondazione to cancel de Benoist's invitation both considering his nativism and influence over the Italian far-right; those who formulated it study and are alarmed by such European movements, hence solely wanted Fondazione to invite leftist thinkers. The fear of right-wing views' legitimation and awareness of the Foundation's leftist ideology made the letter's intellectuals outline Feltrinelli's work as one that should solely explore antifascist beliefs. The 800 signatures signify the letter's perception of Fondazione purely as an institution for leftist debate was shared by the public. A peculiar attempted, external superimposition as a leftist conversational institution was initiated by What is left/what is right. The epistemological, debate role of the cultural institution did not shift as de Benoist held a lecture, however the Foundation moved such initiative in April, possibly acknowledging the controversy of hosting a right-wing philosopher shortly before the elections. Fondazione was therefore not willing to negotiate on its promotion of dialogue between opposing beliefs, as censoring right notions negates democracy's pluralism. Rebels are those who can grasp differing views' salient points while agreeing to listen. The concern should focus on the relation of one's cultural framework inter-subjectively, as opposed to how to "accurately represent the other" (Gregos, 2018: 34). In fact, one argues the institution's explicit leftist origin does not imply an overriding antagonistic us-them rhetoric between such and the right, as prevented by its mediation, confrontational and pluralistic calling.

Does the outlining of rightist beliefs foster their promotion? Can the promulgation of one, single thesis by an institution truly favour individual thinking? What is left/what is right can surely appear as an ethical dilemma if one merely focuses on Fondazione's political role; nonetheless, this cultural institution defines itself as a social and educational centre as well. It reiterates continuously its leftist beliefs through fascism's remembering and antifascist stance, and whilst it openly opposes rightist thinking and condemns populism as being dangerous for representative democracy, it perceives exclusion from political debate as being futile, unjust and unconstitutional. The "confrontation between adversaries is what constitutes the 'agonistic struggle', which is the very condition of a vibrant democracy" (Mouffe, 2013:7). Fondazione introduced this initiative by specifying again its opposition to Europe's critical hate emergence, nonetheless its ethos dictates the listening to plural agonistic opinions. The open letter and public appeal it originated attempted to define

Fondazione's intellectualism as solely leftist. Perhaps such were the ones blinded by Giangiacomo's political stance, carried forward by Fondazione, thus could not grasp it is also a conversational meeting point for Italians and Europeans. The truth-telling capabilities of intellectuals, epistemological calling of cultural institutions and Fondazione Feltrinelli's clearly stated, self-proclaimed informational role through novel dialogues materialize in the relevance of What is left/what is right guests and theme's topicality. Education must renew itself to mediate and reflect contemporary notions, as opposed to the ruling class' single ideology. Fondazione's cultural domain scope underlines antifascism and tolerance as common-sense values that foster convivial shared experiences, hence did not counter the leftist hegemonic order in place before the elections. The Foundation rather follows a regime of truth where all political camps deserve honest descriptions, especially if the left is to grasp right and populist consensus. Information took primacy over politicization and persuasion with the upcoming elections: this public space welcomes opposing thinkers not as it shares all of their views, but because they are representatives of current politics. The battling of adversaries' opinions prevented an us-them frame from showing. Fondazione also offered small laboratories to students on voting's democratic participatory value, enacting in an interdisciplinary manner its credo that democracy does not concern a minority ("Votare è l'unica forma di partecipazione?", 2018). As a cultural institution with the civic duty of bettering future prospects, its role is that of eliciting contemporary debate. When individuals find themselves at the edge of uncertainty, information and depth are the sole antidotes to the fear it generates (Carr, 2003). Fondazione hopes for a true rather than symbolic role by aiming to enrich its guests with critical thinking: the tool for an educated vote.

### **3.3 –Fondazione Feltrinelli's increased political responsibility given the Government of Change**

Distressing words by Tarantino introduced *Stagione Capitale*: "Europe 2018/2019, an epochal happening is taking place before our eyes...we are about to welcome our first European governments dominated mainly by the right" (2018). While handing a utopic continent born in the hopes of overcoming nationalism, to guarantee progress and peace, to demagogues of populist propaganda "and doing so democratically... we

must take the questions this crisis poses responsibly and think of solutions and shared routes for its defeat. Before it is too late” (2018). A distinct, growing severity shows in such introduction: whereas Stagione Ribelle appealed for a non-elitist cultural consumption, valuing of opposing thesis and participation, the latter notion is greatly magnified in the current season. Globalization, politics and social transformations are topics carried forward in the next season, nonetheless a far more radical analysis and call-to-action appear. Tarantino’s opening remarks discredit Euro-scepticism and xenophobia, attributing the authoritarian right’s democratic wins in Europe to the millions who fail to see such area as a solution as opposed to an obstacle in the reaching of an equal welfare state, and to those who believe walls are sufficient to tackle the migratory phenomena. The crisis of the neoliberal hegemonic model is a core concept of such season, as Tarantino notes the collapse witnessed in Europe and the U.S.A. hints to capitalism’s sole generation of predatory ways. This contradiction initiates retaliation: “economic, alimentary and emotional poverty are increasingly prevalent and turn the relationship of the majority on this planet towards the elite into a violent and ferocious one” (2018). Fondazione hence deems capitalism to be the originator of profound inequalities and subsequent cause of establishment-phobia, or populism. Whilst Stagione Ribelle calls citizens to action to an extent, Stagione Capitale marks a pivotal shared responsibility experienced by individuals and institutions to brainstorm for solutions to current affairs. All hegemonic orders are contingent and cannot be treated as absolute (Mouffe, 2013). This cultural institution detects urgency and momentousness in the recent political developments, thus proposes two vital tasks on which Stagione Capitale rests: rethinking capitalism and rethinking democracy. The hope for democracy’s rethinking is its strengthening through the appearance of a sustainable and innovative basis for a novel economic and social system, which can overturn capitalism’s crisis and contradictions. Fondazione’s civic commitment is the countering of democracy and capitalism’s failures through the questioning of such models.



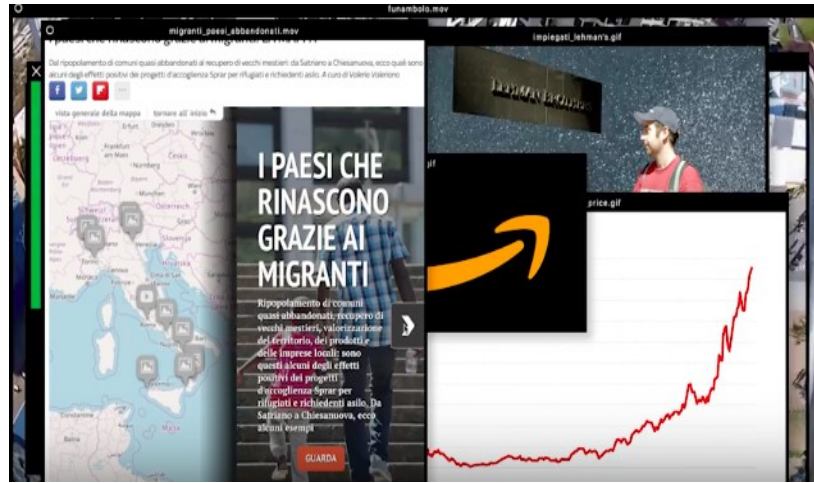
**Figure 7: Funambulist above a city**

(Anselmi P. , 2018)



**Figure 8: Lehman brothers and Amazon warehouse**

(Ibid.)



**Figure 9: Amazon's rising stock value and migrants' reconstruction capabilities**

(Ibid)



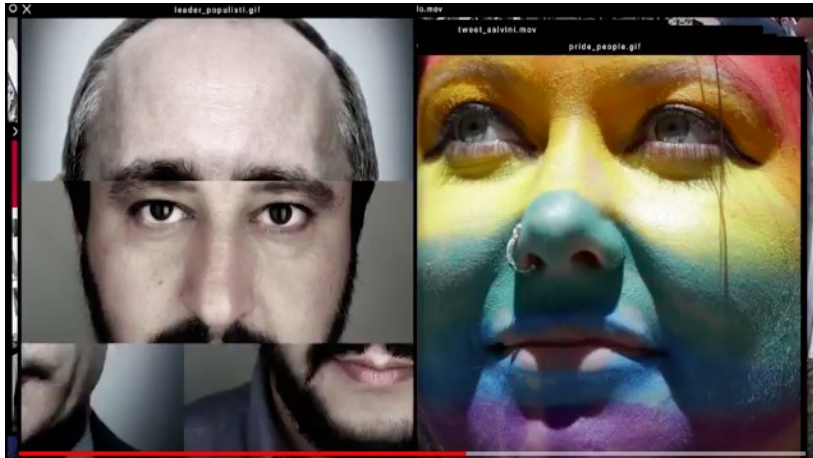
**Figure 10: Salvini's twitter spectacle, the Italian "why" gesture and multicultural athletics team**

(Ibid.)



**Figure 10: Frontiers Repression poster and an immigrant's photographic registration**

(Ibid.)



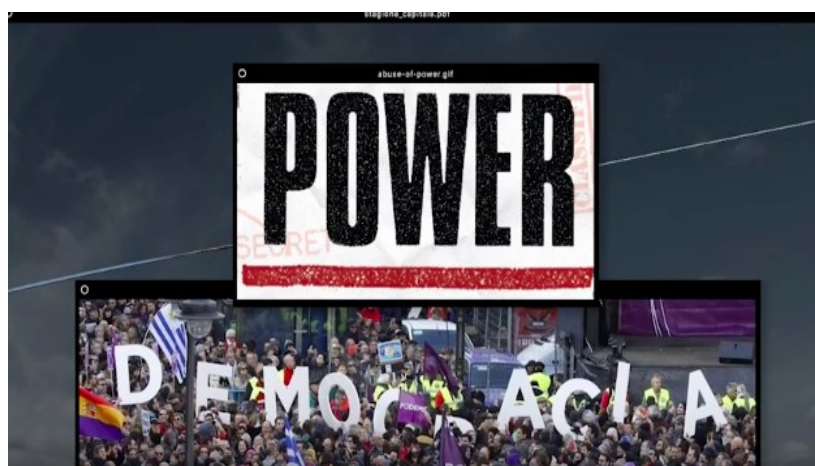
**Figure 11: Salvini-Putin Rubik's cube and a LGBTIQ girl**

(Ibid.)



**Figure 12: Impeach Trump**

(Ibid.)



**Figure 13: Power, Democracy**

(Ibid.)

Rethinking allows for possibilities and alternatives: Stagione Capitale's introductory video in fact bears images of urgency as well as hope. The above images are some of the numerous pictures featured in such, and will be outlined through brief references to their historical relevance and a visual and personal analysis. One will firstly consider Fondazione's archive and then proceed to analyse the video's public art and counter-hegemonic nature. An idiosyncrasy emerges in the hub's archival documents: the institutionalization of the "unworthy". "Archive" comes from the Greek *arkheion*, such as the residence of magistrates who represented the law, where official documents were held (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995). The *archons* were the guardians and interpreters of the archives, which could not exist without a residence. It is in "this domiciliation that archives take place...this place where they dwell permanently, marks the institutional passage from the private to the public" (1995:10). Archival materials are safeguarded by virtue of their privileged topology, and Lombardy's Archival Superintendence has confirmed the historical relevance of Fondazione's conservation (FondazioneFeltrinelli, 2019). This elevated domiciliation however was originally envisioned as a counter-bourgeoisie documentation of international working class movements. Whilst Fondazione's archive expanded greatly to include 1.5 million pieces, where invaluable first editions as *Das Kapital* are found, its first role lied in the valorisation of subordinate classes' political organizations and action (1867). An "inclusive archive" in fact contains the traces of the poor, non-white, women and "unworthy" individuals on top of leaders and heroes (Sekula, 1986). The peculiarity of the Foundation's archival documents is found in the privileged topological location attributed to subordinate classes' heritage, directly challenging the 19<sup>th</sup> century portrayal of culture as an upper and middle class value. Significant parallels can be drawn between such archive and the clip, produced by Pierluigi Anselmi - a story-telling professor, moviemaker and founder of an art collective, "Minimum" (Anselmi P., 2019). While the public sphere has already been touched upon, public art has not: Kwon defines such as socially relevant works which are accessible publicly, engage and empower audiences, consider marginalized groups and foster politically-conscious thinking (2002).

Stagione Capitale video's accessibility is determined by its showing at the start of most lectures at the Foundation, and its dissemination on you-tube. The first (figure 7)

and last image is that of a funambulist dangerously walking on a tight rope, the symbol of Stagione Capitale: this is intended to function as a metaphor illustrating the complex historical moment in social, economic and political terms, and the widespread difficulty encountered by citizens in navigating such. Social relevance appears to guide the video itself, as for instance socio-economic conscious thinking is enticed through the emphasis of the economy's rapidly changing nature. The 2008 economic crash shows through the Lehman Brothers images, as well as the growing prominence of the gig economy (figure 8), through a vast Amazon warehouse and a Cortilia basket, a delivery of in-season fruit and vegetables. A subsequent chart shows Amazon's exponential rise in stock value and a smile materializes through the company's logo (figure 9). This is the first of many oppositions showed through the two companies, as Amazon's prominence and earnings appear through the spacious warehouse and chart, underlining its controversial, voracious (smiley) model; Cortilia on the other hand represents the gig economy's sustainable potential, through the plastic-free delivery of seasonal goods.

The League's promotion of bulldozers' destruction powerful image is replaced by refugees' reconstruction capabilities in the video. Migrants' relocation to dying towns has been one of Italy's immigration policies. Two article headlines ("*i paesi che rinascono*"; "*così i migranti hanno salvato un borgo destinato a morire*") point to the numerous isolated villages - which seemed destined to total abandonment once the older generation passed away – that received a second chance thanks to migrants' repopulation (figure 9). Similarly to the archive's rare documentation of the lower classes, this public art piece represents marginalized individuals and how they can enrich the country, therefore empowering such group through the valorisation of their role. Seconds later Salvini's twitter post "leave, leave, leave ☺", accompanied by a picture of foreigners queuing, appears on the right and is swiftly mocked by the wonderfully stereotypical Italian gesture on the left (figure 10). Salvini's authority crumbles instantly through the derisive hand and the subtle questioning of his distasteful spectacle on social media. The video speaks truth to power: the politician's typical linking of a state of crisis to all foreigners, and consequent hegemonic xenophobia, is delegitimized through the refugees' urban repopulation ways and the bottom image of the all-black Italian athletics team (figure 10). The group is seen hugging after winning the 4x400 meter race and have become a symbol of Italy's

multiculturalism. Mouffe emphasizes art's relationship to politics as well, given critical art initiates dissensus by giving voice to the narratives obliterated by the hegemonic order (2007). Fondazione Feltrinelli's abhorring, antagonism to Salvini's anti-pluralistic notions emerges, also the institution's convivial pro-migration ethos and diverse society's valuing show through the empowering of migrants and by the recognition of the athletics team as representative of Italy. A dangerous emotional poverty is underlined through Salvini's offensive post together with a promising message through migrants' reconstruction and integration possibilities. Whilst the audience did not directly engage in the creation of Stagione Capitale's video, accessibility is also determined by relatability given its social relevance, earned through the portrayal of sub-groups, a plural community and historical happenings as the economic crisis. "Art today cannot be understood as something created by genius, separated from the world we live in" (Santos & Cachola, 2018:1).

A cardinal year for sub-groups' notions, counter-cultures, is pictured in the video: 1968. On the right side the welcoming of migrants once they are rescued from shanty boats, sided by the paradoxical incarceration connotations of the numbering and photographing featured in such hospitality, appear in figure 11. The *Frontiers = Repression* poster on the left recalls the 1968 French anti-border protests, which advocated for migrants' rights. The common severity-faith tension is attributed another positive shade through the Black Power salute below the number-attributing activity image (figure 11). This historically significant picture of the 1968 Olympics shows two African-American athletes raising their gloved fists as a sign of human rights' protest against racism within sports. Fondazione therefore undertakes its historical emphasis role by linking the current welcoming of migrants to the anti-racism battles already fought by counter-cultures in 1968; viewers are reminded of the bottom-up's potency through this prominent year and its counter-hegemonic capabilities.

Marine Le Pen, Putin<sup>7</sup> and Salvini's faces mould into one by shifting images (figure 12). This artistic choice effectively draws parallels between these figures' conservative beliefs and recalls a Rubik's cube, possibly hinting to the complexity

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<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Putin is the current President of Russia. He held the same position from 2000-2008.

brought about by the current political climate. Compared to Stagione Ribelle, one believes an antagonistic us-them frame appears - liberals vs. demagogues – throughout the video. Despite the fact the cultural centre openly condemns binary thinking in favour of multiple opinions, dichotomous juxtapositions are employed in the video both to evoke urgency and optimism, and for its political views to transpire. In fact the aforementioned politicians are portrayed in tension with another sub-group, the LGBTIQ<sup>8</sup> community. The rainbow girl symbolizes such through the group’s colours. Fondazione’s pluralistic vision of society is once again underlined through the lugubrious grey-coloured politicians that favour the colourful accentuation of the girl’s face. Salvini and Trump are the subjects featured the most in the video: the former’s cult of the leader is weakened while the latter’s impeachment is promoted (figure 13). Artistic agonistic practices can significantly challenge dominant, hegemonic values (Mouffe, 2007): rather than his own Messianic portrait or his status as voice of the people, Salvini is presented as a conservative politician who cannot represent Italy’s multifaceted population through the outlining of his anti-migration and anti-LGBTIQ credos<sup>9</sup>. Politically-conscious thinking is marked by the Foundation’s antagonism to right, illiberal politicians and through the call for active citizenship in the second last “power, democracy” image. The central notion of democracy’s rethinking does not entail its discarding: it must be strengthened through a collective questioning of such so to ameliorate its complexities. The cultural institution urges citizens to act by reminding them of their significance: the hundreds of hands holding the “democracy” sign are both the ones needed to sustain such model and to enable its reshaping. Again, images’ persuasiveness and impact is incomparable to written text’s rigidity (Mirzoeff, 1998).

Art must be considered through the “symbolic value of the ‘world’ it suggests to us and of the image of human relations reflected by it” (Bourriard, 2002:18). Fondazione Feltrinelli does not solely preserve art in its archives, it produces such as well: Stagione Capitale’s video is a public art piece that is accessible, stimulates political awareness through historical and current renowned images and the symbolic - rather

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<sup>8</sup> LGBTIQ is an initialism for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer community.

<sup>9</sup> Salvini’s latter opinion was omitted in the previous chapter and can be exemplified through his participation in the World Congress for Families XIII in Verona, an openly anti-abortion and anti-LGBTIQ rights initiative in the name of “natural families” (Repubblica, 2019).

than participatory - engagement of subgroups. It shares the archive's non-elitist celebratory nature of marginalized groups and similarly to the former's counter-bourgeoisie origin, the video functions as a challenging artistic practice with regards to the anti-pluralistic, populist ideological order. Cultural hegemony does not always generate consensus, as organic intellectuals initiate social change by countering common-sense views (Gramsci, 1957; Mouffe, 2013). LGBTIQ rights' valuing and migrants' inclusion no longer constitute as Italy's shared values and thus dominant culture, given they are discarded by the Government of Change; however are advocated by Fondazione through an us-them, liberal-illiberal antagonistic juxtaposition. Rather than considering populists' views, Fondazione uses a dichotomous style to signal the severity of the current populist moment. This cultural space's continuous historical narrative - its leftist opinion - clearly materializes through the use of oppositions and emphasis of the LGBTIQ community, anti-racism 1968 protests, Italy's refugees' repopulation capabilities and multi-culturalism. Foucault intellectuals' specific political struggle is combined to a global overview (1977). The clip's world echoing arises through international politicians, the historical and global relevance of 1968 and the 2008 economic collapse, whilst opposing specific phenomena as Italy's xenophobia. Neoliberalism's predatory ways and consequent widespread inequality are among the video's first images. Compared to What is left/what is right's purely educational purpose, the video aims to inform through its social and historical relevance, however is certainly not short of politicization. Salvini's authority and cult are targeted by the humouring of his insensitive social media use, his common representation of the people is also hurt through the portrayal of Italy's ethnically diverse society and his opposition to LGBTIQ rights. In light of Italy's populist government, Stagione Capitale's introduction and video are centered mostly on a struggle against such demagogues. Despite the Foundation's explicit delegitimation of Salvini's ways, which hinder conviviality, one argues populism's democratic origins and right to agonistic debate are not questioned. The clip denounces rightist notions, yet underlines everyone's responsibility to engage politically by depicting democracy's functioning as the majority's task. Art draws its political potential from its intrinsic inclusiveness and offering of alternative narratives (Power, 2018). The institution's political and intellectual opportunity manifests: it organically opposes the consensus and wishes for social change by calling for citizens' engagement. The video's alarm is not

intended to surpass its promising connotation: democracy's rethinking and subsequent strengthening through participation can achieve the people-against-the-elite mentality breakdown. Art and politics are mutual fields (Mouffe, 2007).

Notwithstanding *Stagione Capitale* video's intentional condemning of populist politicians, Fondazione generally reacted to the League-M5S's coalition by continuing to study, communicate and share multiple materials on such phenomenon. Similarly to the previous season, a potent yet not absolute critique of such emerges, however the topic gained unprecedented relevance in the Foundation's cultural scope. 10 articles concerning populism were published just between January and March 2019. Carr concludes assumptions and simplification are enemies of learning and cultural institutions' promise is to defeat such (2003). Fondazione as well believes its duty entails reductionism's opposition. Populism's definition therefore continued in *Stagione Capitale*: its pluralistic aversion and depiction of society as definite, lacking stratification and social interests were noted (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Casalino, 2019). The historian Levis Sullam is hesitant on the use of the term "fascism", given it should directly point to a European phenomenon of the 1920-40s, nonetheless holds no doubt on the parallels between such and the Five Stars (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). The author accuses the League of xenophobic tendencies yet deems it a traditional right movement; the M5S's presumed voicing of the people however implies the movement's populist identity. The Five Stars propagate an illusory democracy: the *volontè generalè* is fictional, while in truth a symbolic substitute of representative democracy that is non-parliamentary hence totalitarian shows. The Rousseau platform is a tool for supporters' control (2019). Benadusi's historical analysis has led him to argue as well for the past's reoccurrence, where the League is the subject. Historical fascism was a movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, instead what we are witnessing today are notions as xenophobic nationalism, intolerance and opposition to multiple opinions, which fall under the general notions of fascism (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). Salvini often intentionally draws links to historic fascism, for instance by quoting Mussolini: "many enemies, much honour". The Minister also trivializes such (similarly to his colleague on stage) by claiming that what occurs in the European Government, finance and spread, is much graver than fascism. Another article relates populism to one more notorious individual, Berlusconi. Surely populism's racism, anti-academic and anti-science stance

perpetuate an image of politics lacking cultural references, nevertheless Panvini believes intellectuals can only oppose these phenomena by acknowledging populism is a cultural matter (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). Berlusconi turned Italy into a laboratory for the extension of the common politics-culture duality to the power, society, new communication mediums complex relation. Just as mass culture and television were essential for Berlusconi's rise, the digital revolution allowed the Five Stars to rethink collective mobilization (2019). Hate has gained cultural hegemony: this aspect was initiated by Berlusconi and reached consensus with the League, with conspirationism as the most alarming feature of such hegemony. The most "neutral" characteristics identified in Fondazione's recent populist literature are society's homogeneity, whilst the predominant themes tackled are populism's conspirationism, links to fascism and its interpretation as a troubling cultural issue.

Populism's global emergence should not implicate assumptions on such: characteristics, effects as well as causes are explained in detail by Fondazione's numerous publications. Casalino underlines how the interregnum of a dying order is commonly characterized by charismatic spectacles (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). A cultural matter shows as the public spirit acquires quick, reckless thinking that often leads to scapegoating. The author makes a remark later considered paramount to this paper: among the hate generated by the financial sector as well as political choices, populism is a symptom as opposed to societies' disease. A symptom that grows by the day and is degenerating in an actual disease: neo-fascism (2019). What is left/what is right was replicated in Stagione Capitale for the lead-up to the European elections: even here, one notices the populist wave's outlining was prioritized. Francis Fukuyama and Chantal Mouffe were invited as keynote speakers for such initiative, to introduce respectively *Identity* and *For a Left Populism* (2018; 2018). Mouffe is among the most renowned advocates for leftist populism and conversely Fukuyama perceives populism as a danger to democracy: while their theses could appear distant, one argues both promote the rethinking of democracy through emotionality. Mouffe reiterated her core beliefs; this global populist moment represents an opportunity for left populists to foster a new order, yet will constitute an authoritarian turn if not acted upon (What is left/what is right, 2019). Above its responsibility, the left bears culpability. Social-democratic parties' shift towards the centre caused the feeling of abandonment among popular fringes, while their accepting of financial capitalism's

*diktat* contributed to grave economic inequalities. Thus the left is partly to blame for populism's main cause: the neoliberal hegemonic order. The crisis of such system goes hand-in-hand with post-democracy, as the popular resistance against neoliberalism initiated the erosion of democracy's two pillars, equality and popular sovereignty (2019). Both left and right populism originate from unsatisfied demands, propose democracy's recovering, however do not necessarily share egalitarian objectives. Populism is defined by the division into two camps and the distinction among left and right lies precisely in the composition of "we". Right populists in fact promise popular sovereignty solely to "true nationals". Furthermore, the people negatively affected by neoliberal policies are many more than those traditionally considered left voters. This is where Mouffe's opportunity shows given left populists must undertake "radical reformism" to form a new economic, as opposed to political, order. This project's radicalization of democracy would not take a left extremist form, rather the construction of a progressive majority surrounding themes as exploitation, domination and an ecological concern. In response to Filchestein's assertion that populism is an authoritarian form of democracy during the initiative, Mouffe affirmed the movement she promotes respects liberal-democracy. Finally, Italy can radicalize and hence strengthen democracy through the valorisation of its rich leftist tradition, allowing for the development of potent left patriotism. Ideas gain prominence through affect: the Italian left must prioritize sentiment to rationality, mobilizing an identity within people and consequently patriotism (2019). Mouffe distinguishes left and right, specifically the populist camps, identifies neoliberalism's crisis as their originator and gives a radical lecture in Fondazione calling for left populists' action.

By capturing people's emotions, not just reason, Fukuyama believes populists can be defeated (What is left/what is right, 2019). The author notes three causes for populism: the most cited one is globalization and the pressures it created among the Western world's working class. A political trigger is exemplified by Italy and USA, where ineffective governments and their lacking services produced a significant demand for strong, charismatic leaders. Identity is an aspect Fukuyama suspects is greatly underappreciated in the populist analysis: considering the issue brought about by neoliberalism is deep inequality, why did the left – which promises to protect society from capitalism – not experience an upsurge of support? The defection from left to right begun with the first's increasing cosmopolitanism, association to the

privileged strata and consequent distancing from the working class (2019). The left reconceptualised towards a multicultural approach, typical in elevated education, no longer providing representation for the general population; it created a fertile ground for populists by also failing to seriously promote the notions of the nation. All individuals have an innate, incorruptible dignity: the missing recognition of such has driven politics historically, where passion prevails over economic interest. National identity still functions as a source of recognition and Brexit voters preferred “protecting” the community from foreigners, rather than acknowledging the economic catastrophe warnings. The recurrent dichotomy of populist vs. non-populist approach is implicitly accepted by Fukuyama who argues “what can we do to counter this threat to liberal democracy? We find a symbolic way of supporting national identity” (2019). Right populists’ nationalist reappropriation of identity through ethnicity is unacceptable in our *de facto* multicultural societies, nor can a single religion represent a population and hence shape identity. By drawing on the emotionality typically equated to populism, Fukuyama wishes for a democratic majority with ideals based on constitutionalism and national identity to form. Lerner acted as the mediator and further contextualized Fukuyama’s remarks to Italy by noting how instrumental religious identity can be at times: the League travelled from pagan, Celtic rites to rosaries (2019). Therefore Mouffe states democracy can be rethought and strengthened through the formulation of a progressive left populist paradigm, achieved through left patriotism; Fukuyama denounces populism as anti-democratic yet agrees with the populist binary division of society, and calls for emotions over rationality for democracy’s rethinking as well. Fondazione’s predominant criticism of populism cannot be said to be perennial and its leftist origins and guests do not censor the left’s culpability within populism’s emergence. Its educational role mainly entails the countering of populism’s hegemony - thus acts as an anti-State Apparatus - nonetheless the Foundation maintains a critical stance even with regards to the left.

Just as antifascism is promoted through historical reviews nonetheless such term is also questioned by Fondazione, populism is often linked to historical fascism through the paralleling to the past however the term and link do not escape challenging. Bidussa judges the development of populism’s discussion solely around the fascist vs. antifascist axis as reductionist (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2018). He introduces a laboratory for researchers and professionals, where current political anxieties will be

understood through the nationalism-populism-Euroscepticism question, by assessing how the exorbitant use of the term fascism can initiate its analytical loss. Such term has made a remarkable comeback in Italy, either in nostalgic terms or employed by those who fight it as if it were an Italian brand. Bidussa does not deny the link between fascism and populism, however warns readers of the intellectual ineffectiveness which can arise through constant citing of fascism and the understanding of populism solely through such connection (2018). The article initiates the unravelling of the populist knot: souverainism, one of its features, does not just equate to nationalism, as the first is a cultural and social perception of the group that is equated in economic terms. Bidussa provides a solution on top of his populist specification, noting fascism as a term can regain intellectual prominence through its reading in economic, sociological and anthropological terms, as well as history of course.

Upon seeing the results of March 2018's elections and the establishment of an extremist, anti-pluralistic government Fondazione Feltrinelli felt irrevocably called to pursue its educational duty while mainly criticizing populism. While one is not left to guess the institution's perception of populist demagogues in Stagione Capitale's introduction and video, binary thinking does not travel from the clip to the publications, as conflicting and different readings of populism are promoted to achieve productive agonism (Grossberg, 2017). One argues an us-them rhetoric solely emerged in the video, as the literature offers multiple readings of populism, where such is not demonized as the absolute enemy. Cultural institutions' duty rests in the favouring of multiple contexts (Carr, 2003). Fondazione typically disagrees with a populist characteristic, simplification, and this movement's reduction as well; nonetheless utilizes dichotomies solely in the video to reaffirm its concern for the populist moment. The latter's gained prominence in the hub's cultural scope, between Stagione Ribelle and Capitale, is exemplified by the exorbitant increase in publications concerning it. The in-depth literary review of the recent publications served to grasp the various analyses of the phenomenon. Significantly, the definition of populism grew in Fondazione's texts with its governmental establishment in Italy. Most of the populist characteristics identified in this thesis' theoretical framework were noticed among the institution's publications and events: the potency of the spectacle, homogeneous society, hate and politics of resentment, racism, anti-

academic and anti-scientific notions. Scapegoating and conspiracy as well are noted as populism's effects. The neoliberal order's crisis – a core concept of the season – is unanimously regarded as a pivotal cause and the threat posed by populism, or specifically right populism, to democracy echoes Tarantino's words throughout the season's publications. The topicality of the promulgations and initiatives' both materializes in their contemporary discussion summaries and in the national-international outlook, defined in the institution's self-proclaimed scope, of populism's emergence. Therefore one believes the recent publications effectively illuminate contemporary debate. Fondazione's informational role materializes both in the topicality of its work that continuously adapts to society's transformation, and in the emphasis of populism's characteristics, effects as well as possible solutions. Mouffe, similarly to Fukuyama, proposes the rethinking of democracy through left patriotism's emotionality. Fondazione therefore both proposes texts which directly link Salvini's populism to Mussolini, and Mouffe's radical calling for left populism. This cultural space's antifascist struggle through its historical emphasis duty repeats itself in *Stagione Capitale*, however a more critical understanding of Italian populism is offered through its repeated association to fascism. Whilst the left's culpability is noted, solely leftist thinkers in fact undertook thorough definitions of the first and populism. Compared to *Stagione Ribelle*, Fondazione Feltrinelli's current populist debate still offers several readings, however all are organically intellectual given they oppose Italy's dominant culture represented by the coalition, either explicitly condemning it or implicitly doing so by comparing it to an authoritarian rule. All intellectuals have the choice of supporting the dominant common-sense or not, nonetheless must recognize their professional category's responsibility (Chomsky, 2011). Agonistic views are found in the Foundation's initiatives, nonetheless they typically counter the present-moment anti-pluralistic order: both this thesis and Fondazione mainly value specific, liberal intellectuals who view their role as permanent persuaders joining in the political struggle. The momentousness of the Government of Change's establishment called for the Foundation's employment of its privileged position and thus opportunity to increase its political, leftist responsibility. *Stagione Capitale* video's rhetoric of severity materializes in its recurrent yet not absolute populist critique.

### **3.4 – Democracy’s decline is the disease, populism a mere symptom**

Mouffe views the primary role of agonistic struggles as the challenging of neoliberalism’s hegemony. No order should be treated as incontestable: “this is why a liberal democratic society requires a debate about possible alternatives” (Mouffe, 2013:7). Populism certainly finds a central space in Fondazione Feltrinelli’s intellectual work and countering, however it would be diminutive to assess the opposition of such emergence as the institution’s imperative task. Fondazione poses the bettering of society’s future prospects as its priority and notes two ambitious activities to do so: rethinking capitalism and rethinking democracy. As noted, brainstorming for alternative economic models is perceived as the most significant strategy to achieve the latter. One argues this cultural centre favours the countering of democracy’s decline, rather than the labelling populism as the ultimate enemy.

Resistance requires studying and Fondazione has reflected on the crises of knowledge with fervour. This collapse was confirmed by a troubling study: Ipsos Mori compared national perceptions of reality to statistics, only to discover Italy is the most ignorant country in Europe (2017). 14% of Italians believe certain vaccines cause autism and 31% of Italians think terrorist attacks have increased since 9/11. Again, 34% of prisoners are foreigners yet Italians think such are 48% and 50% of such population perceive murder rates as having increased, when they have fallen by 39% since 2000 (2017). Ignorance here is intended in the literal sense, as lack of awareness of everyday life (Alleyoop.ilsole24ore, 2018). Fondazione undertakes the crises of knowledge through historical and contemporary debate, outlining national and international factors. An article emphasized D’Alembert’s philosophical inquiry into the courageous, enlightened path to ameliorate the human condition: individuals are subject to power relations however bear the duty of illuminating knowledge through truth’s pursuit (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2018). Algorithms, filter bubbles and echo chambers are noted as global causes of post-truth (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Artieri, 2018). Polizzi noted in 2016 - before the full extent of the crises had been demonstrated by populism’s global emergence - that speaking the truth to power entails not only confronting political, but economic power as well as the public opinion, given the latter is growingly gullible to unverified notions (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2016). Current politics are in fact witnessing appeals largely based on

emotionality, distant from factual analysis; algorithms and filter bubbles generate isolation within informational bubbles, made to coincide with the truth by individuals, similarly to echo chambers where single theses become amplified. “Platform politics” cause polarization and citizens’ turning against rational debate (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Artieri, 2018). Truth is often tailored: it originates from an obscure algorithm that creates a suit to fit its user (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Pucciarelli, 2019). Croce deems the present a bubble democracy of interconnected solitude where rising numbers choose to believe what confirms their emotional prejudices, nonetheless there is a significant knot that ties freedom, truth and subjectivity (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). Rather than echoing one political, cultural or religious authority’s notion, one can gain autonomy by questioning the world as it unfolds. Croce argues “we believe that culture, information and research’s role is that of promoting accurate analyses, complex thinking, deep and well documented investigations to render truth a certainly conflicting yet shared ground” (2019). Freedom of expression is not only a right and duty: it is citizens’ practice for the exercise of truth. Sapere aude! is thus a motto which remains relevant across time.

The infamous shift from reason to emotionality in the Italian context has been assessed by Fondazione. The historian Prospero de’ Benedetti deems Italy’s anti-other prejudice an identity question (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Troglio & Panaino, 2018). Memory’s horizon is annulled by the fact individuals feel as though there is no future: when the notion of time’s development disappears, the illusory perception of fixed identities is enhanced. The other is seen as a threat, not solely given his foreignness, rather his instability in space and time. This notion was debated in an interdisciplinary manner, as the philosopher Veca detailed in the public event “Contemporary fears” the anxiety others elicit stems from the fact they are not sufficiently “different” (Pauree Contemporanee, 2018). Given the other is only distant to an extent, one fears of being “contaminated” by such. Prospero relates Italy’s post-truth to the greatly restricted opportunity university degrees still represent. Access to such only witnessed a significant growth in the ‘60s, giving life to the wonders of ‘68. The hope held by the historian is for cultured journalism to seek the truth while passing “history’s torch” on (2018). Among these investigations, intellectuals and citizens’ pivotal duty to seek accurate facts are accentuated. Fioravante similarly relates Italy’s political, scientific and journalistic authorities’ loss of authority to the growing cultural degraded forms

and functional illiteracy, such as the inability to employ reading, writing and mathematical skills in everyday life. 23% of the adult population does not have the basic ICT skills (OECD Skills Outlook, 2013; Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2018). Significantly the returning illiteracy and functional illiteracy purely originate from political choices regarding public education. Notwithstanding the fact Italy has among the highest educational taxes in the EU, it does not follow the general European trend of increasing teachers' incomes, nor does it provide proportionate scholarship opportunities (2018). This country is among the last in the EU for public spending on education and suffers from a school dropout rate of 14% (ISTAT, 2018). Fioravante argues people's inability to distinguish reliable sources, the proliferation of fake-news and debates which question the pillars of scientific thought should certainly not come as a surprise given Italy's failing public education. Far from "natural" exclusion of some as the one women used to experience, Italy's troubled knowledge largely stems from conscious political decisions (2018).

Among Fondazione's analysis of the crises of knowledge's general trends, two results hint to democracy's epitomized decline: the killing of political opponents and questioning of universal suffrage. Totalitarianism's return in Europe does not singularly imply a regime of terror, as it primarily entails the delegitimation of opposing opinions and thus the rejection of democracy's inherent heterogeneity. Pawel Adamowicz was Danzica's liberal Mayor who was killed by a Polish extreme right supporter, and confirms this reality (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2019). Further, the debate concerning the quality of democracy, and thus the alphabetization of citizens and amount of information such are exposed to has made a notable comeback given the disintermediation between political institutions and the public (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Fioravante, 2018). Specifically new media and social media's informational capabilities and quasi-hegemonic shaping of public opinions, and the increasingly populist phenomena brought this questioning about. Classic liberalism has always been concerned with the issue of ignorance and its effects on democracy; nowadays however the awareness of the complexity of certain voting topics and lacking meeting between such knowledge and shared skills has climaxed. Brennan proposes all voters should take a test and Van Reybrouck advocates for voters' drawing lots (2013; 2017; Fondazione Feltrinelli, Fioravante, 2018). Timeless questions concerning universal suffrage's validity are amplified by the paradoxical

election of anti-democratic populists, but point to democracy structure's instability rather than the politicians themselves. Democracy's threat arises from its incompleteness. The digital infrastructure aids the sharing of untested theories and lies, nonetheless the issue lies in liberal democracy's structure given an evolution towards truthful equality is yet to be – as demonstrated by Italy's education - trapping itself in an anti-democratic loop (Urbinati et al., 2018; Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2018). Populism and its often associated rejection of rational thought is simply a symptom of democracy's partial nature which then viciously cycles and enhances its crisis. The Foundation's task of rethinking democracy functions as an acknowledgment that the issue and solution lie there. Populism is certainly in opposition with the Foundation's pluralistic ethos, however it is merely a political materialization that magnifies democracy's complexities and contradictions, as the current challenging of everyone's right to vote. Fondazione's daily intellectual work goes further than populism's countering: it strives to grasp society's major ills as unequal access to education, diminishing rational thought and totalitarianism. These are inevitably linked to the politics of resentment, people vs. the elite rhetoric, yet hint to larger democratic failures. Moreover, the cultural centre recognizes the current disorientation goes further than such political emergence, as exemplified by the initiative "The truth on the present, I beg of you", which covers the unsuccessful promises of the Arab Spring through its "freedom" lectures, and the Italian mafia and drug market in its "legality" ones (La Verità, Vi Prego, sul Presente: Libertà, 2019; La Verità, Vi Prego, sul Presente: Legalità, 2019).

Fondazione Feltrinelli's striving to ameliorate future prospects, by tackling democracy collapse's causes, shows in *Scuola di Cittadinanza Europea*: during its inauguration, the logo was described as portraying a boy attempting to look over a wall with a ladder, given the ubiquity of exclusion, even in schools (2018). What would have happened if the British had received more truthful information regarding Brexit? This frequent question motivated the Educational branch to launch a programme to aid informed voting. Unequal access to information is both analysed as perpetuating the crises of knowledge among the Foundation's articles and directly acted upon through public initiatives by the Educational area. Humanization is also employed to oppose democratic rights' loss. The exhibition *'900: la Stagione dei Diritti* employs Fondazione's patrimony as the narrator of 10 *piazze*' courageous

actions, which subsequently won human rights. A relevant laboratory for students is offered as well (2018). Rights were obtained through suffering and often lives, yet their winning does not mean they are earned forever, nor that they should be given for granted as their unstable definition depends on cultural, social and political conditions. LGBTIQ and women's rights are featured, however the most thought-provoking piazza is the exhibition's last: "Piazza San Sepolcro, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1919. Mussolini's role was that of building an anti-party in contrast with the liberal right and the revolutionary left... piazze do not solely produce opposition, battles for new rights. Even rights' negation can arise" (2018). This functions as a historical overview and humanization of the individuals who battled to gain dignity, and arguably succeeded in fulfilling Fondazione's reaching of wider audiences. The right wing newspaper *Il Giornale*, while owning a blog that strongly promotes xenophobia and hate as portrayed in the vile picture below, wrote about the exhibition and how it appeals to all (2018). (A thesis centred on the explosion of intolerance in a country might as well include a source to grasp how emotional vignettes can animate crowds and awaken such emergence). Tarantino asserted "participation is vital to the future's construction...this exhibition is a form of resistance to a political phenomenon in which we certainly do not identify, but in which we need to take interest and oppose with the most elevated form: knowledge" ('900: la Stagione dei Diritti, 2018). Therefore Fondazione's countering of populism is recurrent, nonetheless one argues the institution's concern is societal and hence calls for a holistic approach: the philosophical as well as historical analysis of the anxiety towards the other meets with an anti-exclusion educational initiative and outlining of Italy's scholastic paradoxes. The mental and physical walls of different nature are tackled transversally. The institution has a perennial informational duty: knowledge is seen as the antidote to democracy's historical decline and participation its enactment. Awareness has the potential of overturning disastrous future Brexits - which work against the European project - and underlining rights' value, the basis of EU's democratic promotion.



**Figure 14: Opening image of an article titled "Immigrants to Hell"**

(Blog.il Giornale, 2018)

Barcelona and Milan's mayors, Ada Colau Ballano and Beppe Sala, dialogued in Fondazione as well on democracy's strengthening (Democrazia Minima, 2019). Colau Ballano initially emphasized Europe's origins as a land of peace, democracy and rights born as a post-war shared project to prevent future horrors. This project's profound crisis can be attributed to a phenomenon greater than the continent, neoliberalism, and to the excessive technocratic management of Europe, which blurred its original perceived role as protector of citizens' rights. Sala noted three recent elections to point to the cleavage between cities and towns. In the week leading up to the event the first black, gay woman was elected as Chicago's Mayor<sup>10</sup>, Erdogan won yet not in Ankara and Istanbul<sup>11</sup> and Amsterdam was won by environmentalists while the provinces preferred a party which denies global warming<sup>12</sup> (2019). After noting his hope for cities, Sala argued Europe must renovate itself given it is unfinished and hence hard to defend. Fiscal leverages for example should be imposed by the continent rather than countries, to prevent colossal companies from not paying taxes. Italy has a duty of welcoming migrants, surrounded by one of "realism": Milan's Mayor thinks society is enriched by migrations, however complexity envelops the question. To exemplify the implications of the topic and how immediate

<sup>10</sup> Lori Lightfoot is the first African American, openly gay, elected Chicago Mayor.

<sup>11</sup> Tayyip Erdogan and his ultranationalist allies won 52% of votes, however the cities of Ankara, Istanbul, Adana and Mersin were won by the Republican People's Party (CHP) (Financial Times, 2019)

<sup>12</sup> The Greens doubled the far-right Forum for Democracy party, which proved popular among provinces.

racism's appearance can be, he asked: "what happens if someone is told they could become 20<sup>th</sup> rather than 180<sup>th</sup> on the list for public housing, if such were only given to Italians?" The solution to these claims is to communicate and oppose, statistics being an effective weapon. Far from an invasion, Italy has 9% of migrants (2019). "Migration is certainly complex. I only accept this notion however if we add that nothing is simple: the environment is a difficult question, the battle against inequality as well" added Colau Ballano (2019). She discredits immigration's state of crisis through facts as well, by underlining that Europe is an aging continent in need of labour force. Further, it is a mistake to indulge in the idea that migrants are in competition with low-income people for housing in Colau Ballano's opinion; rather the problem is the fact the Spanish state receives European money for the former but spends hundreds of millions in detention centres. Barcelona paradoxically holds one of such against the city's public opinion and this space testifies to Europe's unstable rights' protection. The crisis is far from migratory: it is European. Both mayors hence outlined troubled features of the EU's incomplete project and agreed active citizenship and voting for the European elections are vital to democracy's deepening. The vote can overturn the populist anti-other erasing of the Union and the extension of the rights this land presupposes.

Until now emotionality to foster a progressive identity and counter populism, or specifically right populism, and participation have been traced as general means for democracy's reformulation. The seeking of capitalism's alternative is a specific strategy for such. Thatcher's "there is no alternative" maxim in fact travelled from being questioned among Fondazione's literature in 2016, to becoming one of the two challenged bases in Stagione Capitale. Whilst Chiappero Martinetti had posed the need for a more sustainable economic system - as the "rising-tide hypothesis" that capitalism would have allowed all "boats to rise" is far past (Fondazione Feltrinelli, 2016) – Carlo Feltrinelli introduced Stagione Capitale stating "we must create novel relational and economic models, focused on equity, sustainability and social justice" (Feltrinelli C. , 2018). "There is no alternative" and "rethinking capitalism" are two cultural initiatives that aim to do just this, through options' brainstorming (2018-2019; Rethinking Capitalism, 2019). The former is structured as a cycle of public events arisen from the view that the recent, violent occurrences of environmental, social and economic nature call for a reflection on modern capitalism's paradigm.

Rethinking capitalism combined a 2-day workshop where international researchers, activists and policy-makers under the age of 38 could apply, to a final lecture with guests linked to Western capitalism's alternatives or the promotion of new models of consumption and management of natural capital, as Ecuador's former President, Rafael Correa. Linked specifically to sustainable practices, the initiative "Water Watch Summit" had the task of discussing more efficient, low-impact water uses (2018). Sustainable, alternative economic models are researched and tackled transversally through the specific reporting on water uses. This chapter served as a brief summary of the copious, varied cultural initiatives, recounting a minority of them, to demonstrate how reductive it is to deem populism's opposing as Fondazione's primary objective, its counter-hegemonic pivotal task.

"Populism brings to the fore those unresolved knots at the foundations of Western democracy" (Urbinati et al., 2018: 77). The people vs. elite is among the institution's key topics, witnessed in its increased topicality in Stagione Capitale, nonetheless Fondazione prioritizes its holistic service to citizens' duty. Democracy's contradictions and incompleteness are in fact treated as the main threat to society's future. Among disorientation, cultural institutions promise to allow for reflection (Carr, 2003). The crises of knowledge and exclusion ways are fought through analysis and diverse public initiatives, to give citizens the tools for critical thinking and thus a thoughtful vote. These features together with fear, inequality, scapegoating, unequal education and so on materialize in populism, however Fondazione's analysis and rethinking of democracy/capitalism hint to the fact it is a mere symptom of democracy's profound crisis. Whilst the cultural hub's scope demonstrates it perceives its political responsibility as having increased in Stagione Capitale, the Foundation understands capitalism's reformulation as the essential measure to enhance democracy. This is far off from enacting "moral valuing" of the consensus by acting as a neoliberal ideological machine that legitimizes the hegemonic order (Althusser, 1971; Šešić & Vickery, 2018). Fondazione's overview demonstrates that in quintessentially political agonistic reality, characterized by passion and antagonistic opinions, no order is the only legitimate one (Mouffe, 2013). The emphasis of historian's role and of active citizenship, together with an epistemological duty, are the cultural centre's three most recurrent activities nominated in its self-proclaimed significance. History is consistently cited and

paralleled to the present moment, for instance in rights' valorisation and persistent antifascist struggle. A culture of inquiry shows through dialogue's productive capabilities (Carr, 2003; Grossberg, 2017): to study, communicate and share is the ultimate tool to face democracy's decline and to make citizens aware, which often entails Fondazione Feltrinelli's privileged employment of its speaking the truth to power opportunity. Populism is typically targeted given its homogenous, anti-democratic depiction of society through its outlining and fact-countering. Citizens' civic duty to participate is underlined in the struggle for truth, and in the majority of initiatives (Fondazione Feltrinelli, Croce, 2018; '900: La Stagione dei Diritti, 2018; Stagione Capitale, 2018; Democrazia Minima, 2019), given democracy's strengthening can solely be achieved through such. Similarly to What is left/what is right in Stagione Ribelle, which posed the democratic context with its agonistic theses above all its other priorities, Fondazione's ethos is guided by the vital task of democracy's restoration. It perceives its role within the cultural domain as regenerative of democracy and its pluralism: this requires the questioning of capitalism more than the countering of populism.

## Chapter 4: *Italy's landscape of cultural institutions*

This final chapter will be a comparative one, whose purpose is that of outlining Italian responses to the populist moment through three distinct approaches adopted by differing cultural institutions, and providing context to the peninsula's cultural landscape. Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso and Istituto Luigi Sturzo were selected, as opposed to other institutions, for their combined long history, prominence and fervent undertaking of oppositional roles to populism, respectively emphasising universal human rights and employing a comparative framework through populism's ideology. The Istituto Dignitatis Humanae on the other hand is less established and far from referencing distinguished cultural ideals it hopes to create the future generation of populist leaders (Washington Post, 2018); the overview of such is beneficial to this paper as it accounts for the functioning of Italy's sole populist cultural institution.

### **4.1: Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso's human rights maxim**

Lelio Basso was born in 1903 and was politically committed from a young age. After having joined the socialist youth movement during his high school studies, Basso started writing for socialist newspapers while collaborating with the antifascist movement. Among many, Basso became the editor-in-chief of *Pietre* in 1928, founded the International Socialist Centre and was elected in the Senate in the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity in 1973; he was also arrested twice for his radical intellectualism during Mussolini's dictatorship and sent to the island of Ponza (Fondazione Basso, 2019). Elisa (Lisli) Carini studied law and married Lelio in 1932, as they both shared antifascist values and struggled for democracy and freedom. Lisli was concerned with cybernetics, biotechnology and men's ruthless violence, and worked in the Italian committee for nuclear disarmament (2019). The contemporary Foundation originated from the converging of two different institutions in 2005: both aimed to expand democratic life through historical-social and juridical-institutional studies and reflected Lelio Basso's intellectual and political vocations as a socialist leader (Fondazione Basso: Storia e Fisionomia, 2019). In 1973 the Istituto per lo Studio della Società Contemporanea (Isocco) was founded in Rome and its profile was defined from the start by its vocation for historical references as well as regard for contemporary data emerging from the social context. It defined itself as a "frontier

institution” whose work was never fulfilled by its own certainties (2019). After Lelio Basso’s participation in the writing of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples in 1976, the International Foundation Lelio Basso for the Right and Liberation of Populations was established, which has been a research space for the emphasis and underlining of rights’ violations, to grasp their causes in depth. It promoted intellectual and “on the field” forms of resistance to oppression. Today the merged Foundation reflects Lelio and Lisli’s interest as demonstrated by its socio-scientific interdisciplinary cross. Anthropology, the history of rights, philosophy, economy, sociology and digital technologies are all studied. It holds an archive that is open to the public, with 65 distinct archival funds that have been declared of historical relevance by the Superintendence of the Lazio Region. Isocco and the International Foundation appear in Fondazione Basso’s scope: “it is a natural meeting point for different cultures of fundamental rights and peace, against all types of war, dominion and inequality” (Fondazione Basso: Storia e Fisionomia, 2019), with the objective of studying society’s transformational processes. These aims are promoted through contemporary debate, research, formation courses, projects, conferences, seminars, book presentations, exhibitions and publication in both digital and traditional forms. The formation courses include the School for Good Politics and the Populations’ Rights course.

Fondazione Feltrinelli’s scope is paralleled in the Italian landscape: Fondazione Basso has an informational and historically oriented role. The President Franco Ippolito emphasized at the 2018 AICI Meeting cultural institutions’ paramount responsibility of vitalizing Europe’s common memory and rich cultural tradition. “Preserving, updating and vivifying the best of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s political cultures is essential to offer the new generations the concrete possibility to meet such, hence understand the present to build the future” (Ippolito, *Lo Stato Costituzionale di Diritti come Patrimonio Comune Europeo*, 2018). In fact Ippolito identifies an urgent need to engage the youth, seeing scholastic institutions’ inability to pursue this duty. An explosion of inequalities is taking place 70 years after the UN Paper and 60 years after the beginning of Europe’s unification. Italy is witnessing xenophobic tendencies as well as indifference; far from neutral, these approaches constitute the soil for sentiments of the other’s rejection (2018). A complex responsibility to protect the European project has arisen. Building the future is strictly linked to the strengthening

of the sense of belonging to a common European space. Europe's rich heritage is one of values that cannot be dissipated: the separation of power, constitutional democracy and the guaranteeing of rights and dignity, independently of nationality. The re-emergence of an illusory ideal as populism is occurring at the expense of the original project's authority. Therefore cultural institutions cannot omit rather must underline negative historic facts and struggle for the truth, to counter populist movements; as a matter of fact, Europe's establishment was born as a consequence of nationalism's horrors (2018). Bobbio noted that searching for the truth during times of crisis is a political commitment (1993): Fondazione Basso suggests the comparing of politicians' instrumentalization of the immigrant crisis with truthful statistics. Fondazione Basso hence believes political commitment to be pivotal. It is an openly pro-European institution whose information and historically oriented role strive for the safe-guarding of European values, to reach a just and inclusive democracy characterized by rights (Ippolito, 2018). Speaking the truth to power can achieve a "novel emancipatory opportunity with regards to the dominant thought" (Fondazione Basso, Paulizzi, 2019).

Fondazione Basso's interdisciplinary research appears in the common link between populism's social emergence to the post-truth - technology binomial. Post-truth is defined as modernity's crisis: the collapse of canons of truth and power caused by the overcoming of modern structures, as relations-production-labour models, ruling institutions and communication (Fondazione Basso, Pisani, 2019). Paulizzi outlines how the simultaneity offered by the web induces passiveness in readers, given its "tsunami of information" (Fondazione Basso, 2019). The Internet is an extraordinary public space, however produces campaigns of irrationality and disinformation, which feed resentment. Parascandolo underlines how mass opinions fostered by demagogy and their susceptibility to fake news and conspiracy theories have increased exponentially (Fondazione Basso, 2019). The current model is viewed as guilty: an indissoluble connection ties post-truth and neoliberalism, as the number of clicks matter more than contents' value, hence fake news will be more remunerative and a campaign based on hate will be more popular. Disinformation is tackled by Giua as well, yet the lack of mediation is underlined given professional communicators proliferate unfiltered messages on social media. Harvard demonstrated that Breitbart's contents - an extreme right site that shares non verified information, and criticized

Obama and Hillary Clinton – have been re-tweeted more than any article from liberal media sources (Roberts et al., 2017). It is thus assumed that Trump would not be in power without Breitbart’s deceitful news (Fondazione Basso, 2019). Without mediation, social media functions as the “perfect propaganda”.

Media platforms’ lacking mediation can be both understood as the missing verification of information, as well as leaders-voters’ communication without parties’ involvement. Fondazione Basso, like Feltrinelli, condemns populism as democracy’s collapse. Somma believes an Orwellian frame hides behind the myth of “direct democracy”: this technological populism could lead to democracy’s overturning (Fondazione Basso, 2019). Increased participation opportunities have not fostered active participation, such as citizens’ truthful partaking in legislative and decisional processes, rather it caused the public’s anthropological shift to a passive-judgmental power. Whilst the public does not directly effect legislations, the eye of the “judgemental crowd” gains primacy in the creation of symbols of politicians’ spectacles: leaders found their consensus in an Orwellian manner, moulding their programmes starting from the public’s opinions (2019). This thesis opposes the global populist order and treats it as an illegitimate enemy given its manipulative technological origin. However resignation cannot appear: the causes of post-truth are complemented by possible solutions. Self-awareness in the public must be elicited through the expression of a novel Humanism that recognizes the Universal Human Rights Declaration’s values: justice, emancipation and freedom (Fondazione Basso, Parascandolo, 2019). This is the first of many references to human rights, which play a fundamental role in Fondazione Basso’s scope. Pisani proposes a similar “toolbox” which features an ever-growing collective intelligence, thanks to dialogue and diversity (Fondazione Basso, 2019). The Foundation’s epistemological role materializes in its enquiry of multiple contexts (Carr, 2003), such as populism’s post-truth origins and citizens’ “anti-disinformation tools”.

The populist moment has been analysed in numerous ways that surpass its technological link by Fondazione Basso. Populism’s definition and terminological confusion have been outlined. One of Lelio Basso’s cardinal beliefs was democracy’s sole survival through elected representative and minorities’ control of popular consensus. Salvati defines populism through democracy’s crisis itself: the people’s

sovereignty and the principle of representation are constitutive of democracy, nonetheless are troubled by populism's proposed direct power of the people (Living Democracy, 2010). Dominijanni notes the term's confusion partly derives from the establishment's derogatory definition of all grass-root movements, left and right, as such. Dominijanni does however boil-down populism to a bottom-up, protest movement (Justice's Words, 2017). Whilst Fondazione Basso does not clearly link its epistemological role to the discussing of agonistic views, Pennacchi posits the latter: populism is "not a mere grass-root rebellion, nor a spontaneous resentment consequence arising from a revolt sentiment" (2019). "Professional stirrers", *ergo* large information companies, create these manipulative offers and are aided by technology's predisposition for such.

"No person who is paying attention to what is taking place in Italy can remain indifferent or not commit to restart debates that brought the left's crisis" (Ippolito, 2018). The President's words resonate with the widespread political engagement demonstrated in Fondazione Basso intellectualism's counter-hegemonic relevance: populism's recurrent criticism often starts with the analysis of the left's culpability and collapse. Intellectuals must act as permanent persuaders by participating in the political struggle (Gramsci, 1957). The paradoxical situation we are witnessing, the popular indignation caused by neoliberalism's enormous inequalities that either remains devoid of direction or is hijacked towards right populists' reactionary aims, can be rationalized through communism's political and symbolic collapse (Fondazione Basso, Fazio, 2019). While left and right have become looser terms, the former has acquired a "Homo economicus" essence. Pennacchi criticizes the left as lacking critical and alternative thinking: neo-centrist opinions and TINA's following have become a blind recurrence (Pennacchi, 2019). Fazio links the left's culpability to idealistic as well as economic values: it has abandoned its fundamental duty to envision a quintessentially ideal society distant from a capitalist one. It de facto abandoned all projects to radically transform society and stopped feeding off "utopian energies", which had historically made the left immune to resignation despite unjust conditions (Fondazione Basso, 2019). After 1989 a referential political culture able to shape its mission, attractiveness and identity disappeared. The Italian left is specifically witnessing a grief identity crisis (Fondazione Basso, Winkler, 2019). For instance, Blair thought that discussing globalization was pointless given "the world is

changing in a way that is indifferent to tradition...it is full of opportunities for all of those who are ready to adapt” (ac cited in Fondazione Basso, Fazio, 2019). A superficially optimistic reading of globalization and abandonment of the left’s schemes are apparent, as its anti-hierarchy language and spokesperson’s of subordinate classes’ role were effaced by individuals’ self-responsibility in the market (2019). A relatable component was lost once the left proposed citizens must exploit globalization’s opportunities, initiating a mass popular strata exodus. Despite the fact Fondazione Basso does not fervently argue for dialogue’s knowledge producing capabilities as Feltrinelli, both follow a culture of enquiry through debate. Its work organically opposes the dominant populist consensus as diverse understandings equated such to a manipulative Orwellian frame, deceitful post-truths, reactionary ways and democracy’s failure. This criticism is not devoid of critical thought: the left’s culpability is noted among Basso’s populist contemporary debate.

At a time when an ethnic narrative was gaining popularity in Italy, Dominijanni condemns the left for not having understood mass mediation’s value. In Berlusconi’s twenty years of influence all political discourse began to pass through media, specifically television (Justice’s Words, 2017). Whilst the left disastrously treated such as secondary, this vertical medium allowed for a top-to-bottom ruling, the disappearance of public-private distinctions and the gaining of capital significance for the political *persona*. The Lega was among Italy’s first populist parties: its political discourse was based on a fragmented, illusory and ethnic population, as opposed to class belonging. Notwithstanding Salvini’s anti-immigration and national aspiration, the foundations of his party did not change greatly from that of his predecessor, Bossi. It travelled from “ethnic-local in the first season and ethnic-national in the second” (Justice’s Words, 2017), where traditional values and land must be protected from invaders. Berlusconi’s legacy - the blurred distinction between mass media and politics that enhances the persona’s self-representation - has been vital for both the Lega and M5S’s web potency. Whilst Salvini’s employment of Facebook might appear naïf, it generates much consensus by drawing its effectiveness from communication professionals as Morisi (Fondazione Basso, Giua, 2019). Grillo’s blog editor, Casaleggio, equivalently understood the former comedian could enter the digital sphere as a tv personality, and used his predominant YouTube presence as if it were tv on demand. Santoro underlines his work should not demonize his populist

adversary, rather underline M5S digital-era party's characteristics (Fondazione Basso, 2019).

Mediums succeed when they respond to a demand created by one before. Eco described "neo-television" as the moment when such ceased to be a mere screen, and started giving the crowd a feeling of participation through tv-votes. Grillo's tv-personality colonization of the web is a testament to the close tv-web relationship (1983; 2019). Santoro argues the "direct façade" of the one-equates-one in the Five Stars "disappeared long ago - even in the moments of greatest openness, the authority of the founder-father-owner-benevolent and comedian-guarantor was always present" (2019). Furthermore, the demands created by neo-television's interactiveness have been filled by the Rousseau platform. Digital mediums strive for an ensemble of distinct audience niches and the social media *par excellence*, Facebook, allows such to seldom meet thanks to algorithms (2019). The Five Stars have never celebrated a national assembly nor can voters discuss among each other on its *ad hoc* platform. Here, one can communicate with the voted and submit proposals. The Rousseau platform thus functions as an arena where electoral differences never become contradictions: they co-exist side-by-side, given collective dialogue cannot arise from the voters-voted asymmetrical communication. Mosca demonstrated that the number of activists involved in the writing of M5S laws has dropped dramatically: the average comment per law project travelled from 446 to 63 from 2014-2017 (2017; Fondazione Basso, 2019). As opposed to creating a thinking group, a movement of automated individuals shows as collective action loses prominence without debate. The platform simply reduces the voters-voted tension through a fictional *volontè generalè*. Santoro acknowledges the importance of agonistic opinions for true dialogue to emerge, given politics should be constituted by critically thinking, collective bodies. Whilst he does not wish to demonize populist politicians, he criticizes the Five Star platform's illusory a-hierarchy as illegitimate; it does not allow discussion. One supposes the unprecedented outlining of populism's technological potency derives from Lisli Basso's cybernetic passion.

*De gustibus et de valoribus non est disputandum*<sup>13</sup>. Pennacchi attributes the populist challenge to the fallacious epistemological equation of “taste” to “values”, concurrent to the market’s pervasion of social life and its shared ideals. The privatization of values, arisen from lack of consensus and their assimilation to preferences, fostered a general indifference to such. In fact populism can be traced to two interlinked issues, neoliberalism’s decline and ostracism within society, which has triggered the questioning of the public sphere’s values, causing disorientation. This cultural loss has been enhanced by the skepticism and relativism it originated, which in turn negate that values can be true or false (2019). The formation course for students “Living democracy” proposes to over-turn the disastrous political situation through a “conceptual tool box”: critical thinking is for instance fostered through the comparison of present-time populist traits and re-emergence to the explosion of xenophobia in the 1930s (2019). The institution’s interdisciplinary, epistemological historical referencing role appears through the course. Pennacchi’s similar counter-hegemonic practice is constituted by a collective “theory of values” needed to defeat indifference, regain independent thinking and the ability to discuss and verify information (2019). This theory challenges both the populist and neoliberal consensus, as it is a cultural construction for the socio-economic rethinking of capitalism. Fazio agrees on the interconnectedness of populism’s appearance and capitalism’s failure, nonetheless proposes a specific group’s refining of values: updating the left’s political culture through socialism’s renovation frame, to gain its innovation and shedding of vagueness (Fondazione Basso, 2019). The socialist denomination has been erased from such European parties, thus a redefinition of democratic socialism is essential. Right populists have been providing regressive, anti-human rights and anti-immigration popular responses up until now. Socialism’s update conversely must create an alliance between emancipation and social protection: the left’s challenge is that of responding in emancipatory and democratic ways to subordinate classes’ safety and social protection needs. Dominijanni is committed to populism’s overturning through a greater democratic reality as well, and calls for all modern progressives to join together and reestablish universal notions that are stronger than fear (Justice’s Words, 2017). The Italian left should include the lacking component that has attracted its old voters towards populism: sentimentality. There must be an

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<sup>13</sup> Latin maxim: “in matters of taste, there can be no disputes”.

acknowledgment that the soil is a populist one and that distant politics have demonstrated their limits in terms of engaging individual subjectivity. Counter-populisms therefore cannot be reduced to rational politics: they must be reinvigorated with emotion through values as *libertè* and anti-capitalism (2017). All intellectuals must not forget their societal responsibility (Gramsci, 1957). Fondazione Feltrinelli's role is paralleled in the Italian landscape by Fondazione Basso: populism is recurrently challenged in the latter's cultural scope. Pennacchi and Dominijanni argue for an anti-capitalism opposing of the populist hegemonic order. Whilst Fazio proposes socialism's eliciting of conviviality through the erasing of anti-human rights ways, Dominijanni and Pennacchi disagree with Mouffe's antagonistic positions: a harmonious consensus on values must emerge.

Agonistic positions have been epitomized in the discussion of citizens' income and racism. Social fragility deriving from precarious jobs is in Dominijanni's view pivotal to the understanding of populism's growth (2017). Ferrajoli described citizens' income as a Constitutional duty in the initiative "Not just redistribution: policies to overcome inequalities" (2018). What must be surpassed is the commonplace neoliberal notion that social and industrial policies, focused on equality and wellbeing, are a cost; they are productive investments. The capitalist "working doctrine" is also flawed in that it cannot provide universal jobs: employing individuals is a guideline of full-employment programmes rather than a rule. Ferrajoli argues the valuing of workers' rights should not be a political choice: "why oppose a direct measure which tackles the right to exist, given employment's devaluation has reached slavery in some cases?" (2018). Significantly, he promotes the dominant M5S's view that the primary benefit deriving from citizens' income will be dignity, as the minimum contractual force given by such allows individuals not to accept "survival blackmailing" - unacceptable job conditions. What Ferrajoli believes to be a constitutive element of the welfare state, Fracassi – who represents Italy's national trade union (CGIL) – perceives as a fallacious, unfinished measure. Social and material questions cannot be solved by mere monetary distributions: access to primary rights and social services must be added to any income provision. The State should directly intervene in the creation of jobs (specifically for women, the youth and in the South) and through the implementation of a strategic lever that provides citizens with social networks (health, education etc.) hence basic human rights, to reach full and

“good” employment. In Fracassi’s view the dignified tool is “citizens’ work”, rather than the State’s singular monetary assistance (2018). Pennacchi links citizens’ income to quitter attitude, thus appraises State intervention as well. The neoliberal objective “starving the beast” (the State’s institutions) materializes in Italy’s State deterioration, as demonstrated by its tremendous lack of public servants compared to Germany and France (2018). Within the precariousness frame and inspired by Bernie Sanders’ researching of public, guaranteed jobs, Pennacchi argues for the hiring of 500,000 individuals as State civil engineers and geologists, among others, rather than spending millions on citizens’ income. The human rights’ maxim prevalent in the Foundation, born from Basso’s participation in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples’ writing, particularly shows among the agonistic discussions of workers and immigrants’ rights and dignity – which will be tackled shortly. Ferrajoli is the sole intellectual who supports a populist value in the Foundation’s work, by paralleling the Five Star citizens’ income to a fundamental right, which is agonistically opposed to Fraccasi and Pennacchi’s counter-hegemonic practice with regards to neoliberalism and populism. Fracassi posits human rights can only appear through the State’s creation of jobs and workers’ social services, as opposed to monetary aid. Dialogue’s agonistic predisposition favours knowledge production through the discussion of citizens’ income pros and cons, dominant and emancipatory opinions (Grossberg, 2017).

“Some, hoping to hide the true problems from the public, blame racism: the truth is that there is no racism. The same, small minorities have continued to practice it” (Fondazione Basso, Winkler, 2019). Racist attitudes are recurrently denounced, as noted in the literature, only to an extent among Fondazione Basso’s intellectualism. Associating populism, racism and souverainism to the socio-economic crisis escapes the understanding of society’s true knots; what is omitted is the lack of politics that safeguard and enact adequate work policies. Winkler believes politicians portray workers’ precariousness as flexibility, yet this solely exists when there is a dynamic market. Most Italians are witnessing sanitary costs’ rise and can only retire once they are 70. The author believes such citizens, living under administrative procedures worthy of the most illiberal countries, have a hard time accepting that foreigners can enter the unregulated labour market. This irritation is the fruit of desperation rather than racism as “politics of rigidity cause underdevelopment and awaken humanity’s

worst trait: the struggle between those isolated...which totally prescind the colour of skin” (2019). Distinctly opposing views appear in Fondazione’s outlining of the other’s treatment.

Among the loss of shared values, we are witnessing the troubling of elementary notions, as politicians’ traditional use of respectful vocabulary (Pennacchi, 2019). Within this frame, Salvini proposed the chemical castration of pedophiles on social media. Notwithstanding the consensus generated by such statement, a punitive act of this sort is strongly outside of Constitutional legality (Fondazione Basso, Billotti, 2019). Ippolito further criticizes the Italian government as being the antithesis of Kant’s maxim - which understands individuals’ reasoning as being based on subjective conditions that determine their actions (1871). The President referenced an occurrence taking place as he spoke: Malta and Italy’s “arm-wrestling” as to who should welcome an immigrants’ boat, causing their imprisonment on such for 7 days. “Europe does not seem to understand that no sea...will prevent these people from attempting to cross the Mediterranean. This has to be the most important inequality, which starts from the most basic right to be recognized as a human being” (2018). Kant’s subjective maxim is violated when migrants’ wills are disregarded through their boat imprisonment, and when the Lega delegitimizes these life-threatening travels as facilitated by a “sea taxi”. During the initiative “Europe’s rights and migrations”, Paciotti emphasized “each individual has the right to search/ be assured of asylum from persecution in other countries” (2019; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948: 5). The Italian Constitution resonates with the Universal Declaration as it notes “a foreigner, who is not guaranteed democratic rights in his/her country that are assured by the Italian Constitution, has the right of asylum in the Republic’s territory” (1946:11), similarly the Navigation Code underlines the duty to aid all of those in a dangerous situation at sea (1942). Ippolito performs a political act, a struggle for the truth, by stressing the gap between these juridical norms and actual facts. Not only has Kant’s maxim been neglected, the Lega-M5S coalition is antithetical to Italy’s own welcoming laws; migrants are often sent back to Libyan torturous lagers after having attempted to cross the Mediterranean. The President argues “it is our duty to go in the opposite direction. We know we represent a minority that believes in integration...in each society there are phases which require for minorities to organize themselves, gain the tools and communicate” (2019).

Dialogue is employed in the institution, is promoted within schools particularly to defeat Italy's cultural issue of racism and is outlined by Ippolito as necessary between European and African countries to truly explore immigration policies. A specific interest is placed in the younger generation, compared to Fondazione Feltrinelli's ambition for an ageless crowd. Ippolito believes this populist moment calls for a convivial, welcoming minority to initiate counter-hegemonic practices, hence emphasizes how minuscule the number of migrants travelling to Europe are compared to global fluxes, and how the aging continent necessitates Africa's doubling population (2019). Whilst Fondazione Feltrinelli surely references human rights, Basso's following of a specific human rights' maxim clearly shows in the migratory crisis debate, through the comparing of Universal, Italian and Navigation rights and duty to actual facts. The M5S-Lega coalition is defined as antithetical and illegitimate due to its disregard for juridical norms. As implied by the initiative's title and Ippolito's previous AICI speech, the European project is vital given it acts as a protector of rights. Fondazione Basso employs its privileged opportunity to oppose the contemporary anti-immigration common-sense, through the speaking of truth and call to action.

"Let us not forget a person's dignity, underlined in all European Constitutions" (2019). Fondazione Feltrinelli's development of a pluralistic common-sense is mirrored to a great extent by another institution in Italy's cultural landscape, Fondazione Basso, with the exception of human rights' superlative position in the latter. Its epistemological role is complemented by the prolific meeting of contemporary and historical teachings, interdisciplinary analysis and dialogue. A culture of enquiry appears through the outlining of post-truth and populism's connections, origins and solutions; a specific emphasis on technological populism shows. Similarly to Feltrinelli, Fondazione Basso opposes the dominant populist order by condemning such challenge as a reactionary phenomenon and manipulative representation linked to democracy's collapse. The recurrent use of this cultural institution's privileged opportunity to oppose populist values, through its intellectualism, notes the contingency of another social order, capitalism. Nonetheless the typical leftist call to action does not prevent the stressing of its culpability. Agonistic dialogue, while implicit within the role, particularly shows in the clashing views on racism and citizens' income elicited rights. In fact, Lelio Basso's regard for

universal human rights materializes in the Foundation's unique rights' maxim: individuals' dignity is noted as imperative hence discussed in migratory and income debates. The gap between the Constitutional rights of all populations and actual facts motivates Fondazione Basso to act politically as a counter-hegemonic, integration minority and speak the truth to power by underlining the populist coalition's antithetical ways.

#### **4.2: Istituto Luigi Sturzo: compare as a means to contrast**

Secularism will now gain a considerable significance in this paper. Luigi Sturzo was a Catholic priest and politician who founded the centrist *Partito Popolare Italiano*<sup>14</sup> (PPI) through his prominent "Appeal to Free and Strong Men": "my long and difficult experience has led me to understand politics as a statute of ethics, inspired by the love for one's neighbour, rendered noble by the aim of common good" (Sturzo, 1919; Il Popolo, 1956; Istituto Sturzo, 2019). By positing that shared morality should be public and applied to politics, Sturzo's religious ethics guided his popularist political stance. The PPI's idiosyncrasy was its terminological ("popular") antagonism to the bourgeoisie - which had dominated Italian politics until then - joined by its "love for thy neighbour" character, as demonstrated by Sturzo's inter-classist objective (Azétsop, *popolarismo vs. populismo*, 2018; Mattesini, 2018). The party did not represent any social class or class struggle; rather, by bringing Catholic masses towards politics, Sturzo hoped to harmonize class relations and strengthen democracy against demagogic phenomena. The Sturzo Institute was established in 1951 by a group of the priest's friends, and prioritizes the relationship between society and democracy within the study of national and international socio-economic transformations. Its disciplines include law, economics, sociology and history, whilst its ethos is born from the notion that democracy is not the sole grouping of its notable procedures, but the expression of society's values as well (Istituto Sturzo, 2019). The Institute holds a rich political Catholicism patrimony, including 140,000 volumes and 1,450 films (Istituto Sturzo, 2019). Research, conferences, seminars, debates, scholarships, workshops and formation courses (for students, graduates, cultural operators and public/private officials) are employed in the Institute's educational scope; nonetheless such believes the young must be especially directed towards the

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<sup>14</sup> The *Democrazia Cristiana* succeeded this party in 1943.

analysis of democracy's radical changes, given this topic's antidotal nature to populations' democratic regression. A civic duty for all cultural institutions to teach the youth the European project is noted as well (Antonietti, 2018).

Istituto Sturzo's peculiarity derives from its outlining of the politician's ideology, popularism, often as a means to compare and contrast populism. With regards to Sturzo's ideological denomination, he purposefully excluded the term "Catholic" when founding the PPI as he supported politics and religion's autonomy. Whilst popularist credos derive from Christianity, Sturzo firmly promoted secularism: "from the start we have excluded the notion that our political teaching was religion and wanted to clearly underline that our primary interest is the nation's public life" (Sturzo, 1992: 99). The Party did not want to resemble the Church's system, nor could it speak in its name. Popularism's centrism results from Sturzo's distancing from any form of extremist, and was coined to differentiate such ideology from communism, nationalism, fascism, socialism and radicalism (Pennisi, *popolarismo vs. populismo*, 2018; Mattesini, 2018). Popularism in fact arose to counter one of Italy's first populist movements: fascism. After the First World War, Sturzo witnessed illiterate and marginalized masses being drawn towards fascism by passion as opposed to rationality. The priest's definition of dictatorships resonates with contemporary populist culture in Mattesini's opinion, such as a convulsive movement of sentiments and differing interests with the sole aim of gaining people's approval (2018). "These sentiments affect the intellect's judgment and can lead...to the weakening of the exact perception of reality" (Sturzo, 2007:235). Fascism's rise resulted both from these sentiments and an individualistic democracy that excluded all intermediate organisms, to connect politicians to citizens directly. On the other hand popularism's paramount aim is the liberal State's democratic transformation, the centralized State's shift to a decentralized one; the purpose is for regional institutions to gain administrative autonomy, hence organically connecting society to institutions (Antonietti, *Agensir*, 2019). As a means to strengthen democracy and prevent extremist ways, Sturzo strived for the people, government and regions' ruling. The people can act as a moral force and limit those in power, while the democratic government controls popular sovereignty. Freedom and authority "should be employed so to prevent, if one is to exceed, the other re-establishes the equilibrium" (Sturzo, 1960: 228; Mattesini, 2018).

Popularism was born as a direct consequence of populist dictatorships' unmediated ruling.

Popularism views society as constituted by collective bodies with differing interests, thus agrees with Mouffe that it cannot be reduced to a single will (Mattesini, 2018; Mouffe, 2013). The PPI, while not representing any specific class, aimed for conviviality to appear through the representation of rural, professional, middle, industrial workers and artisan classes. With Italy's public interest at heart, Sturzo wished to shape the new ruling classes, and the debate concerning the country's development in its post-war's poverty wake (Istituto Sturzo, 2019). Mattesini argues Sturzo's pragmatism allowed such to become one of Italy's most coherently secular politicians. Popularism's relativism both recognizes individuals' agonistic views and is a key difference to populist propaganda: Sturzo did not hold a Messianic vision of politics nor did he promise a "perfect" society. "We negate the idea that we can achieve a perfect state...an absolute good" (Sturzo, 1923:166; 2018). As historical and Christian teachings underline the relativity of each present moment, popularism prioritizes the pacifying values that it considers irrepensible, above politics. The Church's teaching, such as a communitarian demonstration of love, is perceived as being superior to political likings. Istituto Sturzo's educational comparison employs a brief outline of populism and popularism's similarities to emphasize the former's "healthy" traits: both are born from societal anxieties fostered from marginalization, and Sturzo's strong language and request for referendums could be classified as populist. While advocating for a decentralized Government, Sturzo noted the State is a "large octopus that absorbs community life" (Sturzo, 1958:273; Mattesini, 2018). Nonetheless popularism is the sole ideology that can truly mobilize social forces. Nicola Antonietti, the President, mentions Sturzo's antagonism to fascism originated from this ideology's annulling of citizens through an illusory pan-collectiveness, which then led to the cancelling of all other parties in the name of the "people" (Antonietti, Agensir, 2019; Mattesini, 2018). Istituto Sturzo's historical predisposition is demonstrated through the recounting of popularism's birth. Populism and popularism cannot be considered synonymous: Sturzo was fervently critical of society's representation as amorphous.

Political affairs should not be a minority's concern (Mouffe, 2013). Similarly to Fondazione Feltrinelli and Basso, the Institute promotes citizens' political engagement. A cycle of events was inaugurated on the Appeal's centenary to specifically discuss populism and popularism's differences, and to call for citizen's political involvement (*Popolarismo e Populismo*, 2019). Populism threatens democracy itself, by weakening rational thought: "as Italians we must have the courage of being self-aware so to abandon our fears...Europe constitutes a living-together society" (Antonetti, 2018). Italy cannot exist without Europe, whose diversity is juxtaposed to radicalization. Moreover, the concept of "people" rests on that of "freedom" in popularism, which in turn is linked to "truth". The latter is achieved when society is accurately represented through its bottom-up needs (Garavaglia, 2019). "People" also entails democracy, which would become a regime if lacking freedom, just as freedom without democracy entails freedom solely for privileged classes (Mattesini, 2018). One of Sturzo's most celebrated achievements was getting a proportional law approved, with the objective of rendering the bourgeoisie's parties the agonistic opposition, rather than advocating their elimination. On top of people and democracy's mutually regulative ways, the proposition that the representational system should act as a synthesis between the State and society is constitutive of popularism. This should not be confused with direct democracy. Within the study of societies modifications' "medical" purpose, popularism is repeatedly presented as an antidote to populism, both by the Institute's lecturers and vice-president (Pennisi, *popolarismo vs. populismo*, 2018; Di Giovanni, 2019). Popularism's intermediate bodies must function as a means to increase individuals' political involvement: their need arises from parties' inability to represent all. Popularism is an inclusive and institutional integration ideology, whereas populism's direct democracy can solely build a fictional democratic context, given the "superior" society it publicizes and its lacking mediation; it innately works against harmonization. The populist negation of intermediation threatens the democratic modern structure, as contemporary parties are in severe crisis. The latter cannot substitute the government, as those elected require a moral responsibility that ties them to the State (Garavaglia, 2019). The us-against-the-elite rhetoric is opposed, due to its homogenization and anti-institutional ways, to Sturzo's democratic active participation (Mattesini, 2018). The people, regions and governments' sovereignty has remained as topical as it was during fascism's rise, given popularism's inclusive

and engaging politics can counter populism's illusory voicing of the people. The truthful representation of society and people's political engagement can act as populism's antidote. Istituto Sturzo directly opposes populism through the delineating of its fallacious and antidemocratic characteristics, as compared to popularism's restorative ways. A peculiar counter-hegemonic practice through the promotion of a single ideology is noticed in this cultural institution.

Political regression is Istituto Sturzo's primary enemy. It recently inaugurated its 5<sup>th</sup> political formation course, concerning the study of the Italian Constitution given the contemporary troubling of the cohesive and representative features of democratic life ("la Costituzione Repubblicana", 2019). To reduce the distance between politics and the youth, this was complemented by a course for students on political analysis and its challenges, while another course particularly aimed to support all citizens in the lead up to the European 2019 elections (Ile Ragioni e I Limiti della Politica, 2019; Per una Nuova Consapevolezza Politica, 2019). Citizens' political involvement and voting are considered essential to prevent democracy's collapse. Notwithstanding the erroneous association and assonance, popularism is the negation of populism (Garavaglia, 2019). Populism is led by individualism, as opposed to common good, and its celebration of the people is a symptom of its ideological poverty. It is believed Sturzo would be distraught by the association between M5S-Lega's Government Contract and the *volontè generalè*, given its negation of mediation (2019). The struggle for secularism promoted by Sturzo included the avoidance of confessionalism – a de facto mixture of politics and religion. Populism's negation of popularism materializes digitally in the Five Star platform's confessionalist dogmatism; it is all but autonomous from an ecclesiastic hierarchy, a top-to-bottom ruling (Di Giovanni, 2019). Again, the Appeal maintains an impressive relevance today, as popularism's antidotal nature also derives from its just, communitarian attributes. Sturzo's convivial interest included his hope for societies' pacification, disarming, freedom of seas and thus welcoming of migrants. His pro-Europe stance was intended to prevent nationalism from causing future wars (Antonietti, Agensir, 2019; Di Giovanni, 2019). Popularism's love for thy neighbour is strongly opposed to the Lega's politics of borders. This individualistic extremism precisely constitutes as political regression according to popularism's pluralistic view. The Institute's educational and historical roles demonstrate versatility: the advocating for a living-together-society is

complemented by a formation course surrounding the analysis of Europe's migratory waves and integration processes (La Sfida dell'Integrazione in Italia e Europa, 2019). Therefore, not only do the differences between populism and popularism far surpass their similarities, popularism's representative system and communitarian notions are viewed by Istituto Sturzo as an antidote to populism. Agonistic views are acknowledged as legitimate in politics, given difference is constitutive of society, however the Institute employs its privileged position and Sturzo's ideology to compare and oppose the populist hegemonic order. The debate, compared to Fondazione Basso and Feltrinelli, is limited to the discussing of two specific ideologies – populism and popularism – and the support of the latter.

Istituto Sturzo shares with Fondazione Feltrinelli and Basso its epistemological and historical aims, its counter-hegemonic harmonizing practice and citizens' call to action; nonetheless its approach is unique among the Italian cultural landscape outlined, as popularism is employed as a means to compare and contrast populism. Fondazione Basso valorizes rights yet explores multiple and at times antagonistic opinions; Istituto Sturzo however solely considers popularism and argues such can act as populism's antidote, to which it owes its continuous topicality. Sturzo's ethical and just views are capable of reinventing social living (Azétsop, *popolarismo vs. populismo*, 2018). Istituto Sturzo's historical referencing appears through the emphasis of popularism's origin, such as the ideological countering of populist dictatorship's anti-rationalist, convulsive movements through centrist, pacifying values. The latter are said to be above politics themselves. Whilst both populism and popularism emerged as a consequence of inequality, the two are strongly opposed. Populism's anti-institutionalism and anti-welcoming stance juxtaposes popularism's intermediate bodies, diversity and inclusiveness - through which it can overturn the former. The Institute defines popularism by its truthful representation of society and thus convivial ways, by condemning populism's illusory democracy and Messianic portrayal of politics. "Popular" signifies citizens' participation in civil life, which are vital to the opposing of politics' regression as well. Therefore the educational scope of the Institute limits its culture of inquiry; the countering of common-sense populist notions focuses on a popularist analysis while advocating for the latter's consensus. As outlined in the next sub-chapter, secularism can be supported by one priest and detested by others.

### 4.3: Istituto Dignitatis Humanae's populist crusade

Bannon<sup>15</sup> referred to the Istituto Dignitatis Humanae (DHI) by proudly noting: “we call it the school for gladiators” (Corriere, 2019). The Trisulti Abbey, lost in the Italian Apennine mountains, has been the home to monks’ prayer and distinguished pharmacology for 8 centuries, however will soon be turned into a political school to create the populist leaders of the future. The DHI<sup>16</sup> is a think-tank founded in 2008 by Benjamin Harnwell, one of Bannon’s close associates, whose goal is to protect human dignity based on the anthropological truth that man is born in the image and likeness of God. “DHI is a direct response to growing secularist intolerance to Christians that has led to myriads of attacks on human dignity” (DHI, 2019); Judeo-Christian values are perceived as the basis of Western civilization. When the Renzi Government issued a request for Trisulti’s tender - which often occurs with historical buildings that require maintenance - Harnwell assured he would pursue its original nature, cultural activities, and signed a 19-year lease (Washington Post, 2018; DHI, 2019). Notwithstanding Trisulti inhabitants’ opposition to DHI, the populist school is set to open in Rome in the summer of 2019 and move into the Abbey once its renovation is complete (Bannon, 2019). Bannon sees Italy as the perfect political lab and was one of the architects behind the M5S-Lega coalition (Il Giornale, 2019). The latter synthesizes Bannon’s values, populism and souverainism: these will be taught through the disciplines of history, media studies, economics, theology and philosophy (Panorama, 2018). The traditionalist students (“agents of change”) will be 27 to 40 year olds, and will be exposed primarily to the teachings of Bannon and Cardinal Burke, a fighter for the “culture of life” over abortion (Washington Post, 2018). Dignity is the focus of DHI’s research, articles, conferences and press releases. This Institute’s hegemonic analysis is considered vital to the paper. Whilst the Italian populist government cannot be considered directly linked to the populist school, Bannon has met with both Di Maio and Salvini - who has ties with the Honorary President, Cardinal Burke (DHI, 2019).

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<sup>15</sup> Steve Bannon is a media strategist who served during the first 7 months of President Trump's term.

<sup>16</sup> The Institute is active in political lobbying, even in Italy's Chamber (Panorama, 2018).

“Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost?” (DHI, Motoca, 2017). DHI’s Research Director, Motoca, celebrated the speech given by Trump in Poland. Each human life’s dignity and freedom should be protected, from conception to natural death, however an internal enemy threatens these notions: the rejection of Western principles. Harnwell participated in the Universal Declaration of Human Dignity’s writing and emphasizes how human rights and suffrage are manifestations of the Judeo-Christian tradition (Panorama, 2018). Nonetheless the latter innate values and Christian public voice are weakened by secularists’ intimidations. In 1975 Pope Paul VI was already concerned with growing secularization. Today secularism’s corruption appears through pervasive media’s anti-life promotion, and in “maternal health” and homosexual “marriage”. The culture of life must surpass that of death: the galvanized anti-life agenda of mass media has corrupted the consciences of the law written by God on all (Cardinal Burke, 2019). England’s healthcare system uses the remains of aborted babies in its “waste-to-energy” scheme, and incinerated 15,000 fetuses between 2012-2014 (DHI, 2014). The DHI’s Chairman, Luca Volonté (fitting name), argues state-sanctioned crimes as this are hostile towards Christianity: “we consider our Western society to be the most advanced” however “ a society that values recycling efficiency over humanity’s dignity is one that does not have long to survive”(DHI, 2014). Further, the UN structures its third world support through contraception, disguising population control through women’s health (DHI, Burke, 2013). Also, the Lunacek Report discussed in the European Parliament far from bolstering LGBTIQ rights, politically favours such group. The Report includes measures to implement the LGBTIQ lobby in all areas of the EU legislation, as it posits that the current laws restrict its freedom of expression (DHI, 2014). The DHI supposes the eradication of freedom of expression restrictions’ will give LGBTIQ organizations the immunity from limitations applied to everyone else. This will fatally undermine the universality of human rights’ applicability by turning dignity into an arbitrary political allocation (2014). Christians’ superior holding of the moral law’s truth is no longer tolerated (DHI, Burke, 2013). “Dignity” and “truth”, as intended by the Institute, are fervently distant to the same terms employed until now. The DHI supposes Christian values to be inviolable and natural thus leads a crusade for God’s truth. Despite secularism and opposed to Mouffe’s refusal of the Universalist approach which presupposes Western modernity’s authority, the DHI posits that a

harmonic pro-life, pro-family consensus can arise given the universality of Judeo-Christian notions.

Populists initiate states of crisis (Moffit, 2016). This feature is recurring in the Institute's teachings: the mothers of the English foetuses were supposedly not warned about the waste scheme, just as the Irish same-sex marriage vote constituted a threat to religious freedom, however Facebook told its employees to vote "yes" (DHI, 2015). Churches risk being brought to court if they refuse to celebrate same-sex marriages, given the Constitution will not protect their freedom. Bannon's ideology is constituted by two crisis elements: Islamic fascism and the corrupt elite. In 2016 the strategist noted a global war with jihadists was metastasizing between the West, ISIS and Boko Haram. "Trust me, it is coming to Europe" (DHI, 2016). Burke and Bannon's views are mutual, as Bannon notes he represents a pro-life and pro-family movement, whilst the former thinks Islam acts as if it were destined to rule the world (NCR, 2019). Burke admits the Church must be generous with vulnerable individuals, however not with Muslims; the Pope himself fails to see such are typically opportunists. In fact, Europe's moral collapse is partly to blame on Muslims' influx and their pervading beliefs (2019). Burke's educational role parallels the Government's anti-pluralistic paranoia, yet identifies a Christian responsibility within migrants' welcoming: instructing such on true as opposed to bankrupt culture. The DHI is an institution whose teaching mirrors Italy's xenophobic consensus by perpetuating a state of crisis and arguing that limiting "Muslim immigration is...a responsible act of one's patriotism" (2019). Mutual opinions show, rather than agonistic ones, through the demonization of secularism and migrants. An oxymoron manifests in universal "dignity's" specific attribution. It is solely linked to those who do not "exploit" their rights in the European Government, as the LGBTIQ organizations, or those who do not seek asylum opportunistically. Truth to power is not spoken while a clear-cut anti-pluralism appears: what is considered "truth" is everyone's likeness to God, which brings illegitimacy to those who do not share this view.

Enlightened capitalism is another vital aspect in Bannon's legacy. Capitalism's Judeo-Christian foundation has the capability of creating peace (DHI, 2016). Before capitalism's crisis – which is associated to secularism's sapping of the Judeo-

Christian West's strength – this order created a *Pax Americana* whilst generating tremendous wealth in the past century. Bannon disapproves of state-sponsored capitalism, as that in China, and the Objectivist School of libertarian capitalism; respectively one creates wealth for a minority and the other turns people into commodities. Individuals have the God-given right to work and accumulate wealth (Smith, 1776). Nonetheless this can only occur through “hard” capitalism, not one where crony “fat cats” who pretend to be conservative garner all the benefits (DHI, 2016). One proposes crusade rhetoric originating from the state of crisis is intrinsic to populists' discourse; in Bannon's case the war is a hard capitalist, anti-Muslim populist one. Bannon describes himself as the centre-right populist movement's voice, who represents the working and middle classes tired of being dictated by the corrupted, educated elite: “it is all the institutions...who forcibly took all the benefits” (2016). The rise of Breitbart is directly tied to this global revolt. What constitutes a “freedom-loving” capitalism is that which follows Christian values by reinvesting positively and sharing with the working and middle classes, hence avoiding cronyism. The DHI antagonizes all other forms of capitalism that are not hard, promotes the validity of this order and its benefits, and advocates for Italy's souverainism. The Institute in fact also self-identifies as a Souverainism Academy, given its anti-Europe stance. Harnwell started promoting Italy's souverainism after having worked in the European Government - a vacuous institution that solely benefits those who work in it (*Il Sovranismo e' Il Futuro Dell'Europa?*, 2019). Nations' regaining of sovereignty is a democratic matter, as it will allow them to defend their own rather than supranational economic interests. The Institute's souverainism educational role hopes to form the future ruling class mostly through cultural values (*Il Giornale*, 2019). The DHI supports the credo that there is no alternative to (enlightened) capitalism and demonstrates the widely discussed populist anti-institutionalism through the opposition of the educated elite and Europe. Bannon perceives himself as the people's voice and underlines the crusade rhetoric within the crisis discourse by noting the Western and capitalist crisis: “it is incumbent to really think about our role in this battle that is before us” (DHI, 2016).

The home of Italy's pharmacology might become the heart of its disease. Bannon understands Rome as the political universe's centre and hopes to largely impact European elections (*Panorama*, 2018). Luckily Trisulti inhabitants' unrest has been

echoed by the Ministry of Culture, which is currently considering whether to revoke DHI's concession of space, given the inconsistencies noticed in the application's specified purpose (safe-guarding, valorisation) and its actual religious-political scope (Repubblica, 2019). The DHI emphasizes it will use every source at its disposal to fight this revoke, thus battle for the Judeo-Christian West (Washington Post, 2019). Whilst the DHI's politico-educational scope's concretization is uncertain, the outlining of its role sheds light on a unique Italian populist cultural institution, endorsed by the strategist behind the most infamous populist, Trump. Not all institutions in the Peninsula act counter-hegemonically to anti-institutional beliefs. Fondazione Feltrinelli, Basso and Istituto Sturzo's cultures of enquiry, educational and historical counter-populist purposes are strongly juxtaposed to DHI's anti-pluralistic paranoia and hard capitalist promotion; as are their employments of terms as "truth" and "dignity". Fondazione Basso attributes dignity regardless of nationality and religion, while Istituto Sturzo secularly distinguishes its Christian credos from its political view, or truth. DHI on the other hand argues against gay marriage, immigrants' welcoming and regards its responsibility to be populist gladiators' forming. The persecution of Christians – which is at its highpoint - and populists is noted as secularism's victory, which disregards universal values as traditional families. Its self-given role is to teach the populist ruling class through a crusade rhetoric – noticed even in its violent response to the revoke - and state of crisis. Facts in the face of power are prevented by Bannon and Cardinal Burke's anti-Muslim, anti-corrupt elite "voicing of the people". All men must respect each other's dignity however, oxymoronically, one is only given innate rights if he conforms to the "superior" foundations of Western civilization. If Trisulti does become a populist haeven, Harnwell predicts future leaders will descend the mountaints to Rome, to further Bannon's legacy (Washington Post, 2018).

## Chapter 5: *Conclusion*

Nowadays, above a sea of uncertainty and lost canons of truth and power, individuals are required to make funambulism their profession. A global disenchantment with mainstream politics is currently taking place within the age of anger; populist politicians capitalize on such moment and innate binary thinking. Humans draw differences in the world to allow for its understanding (Levy-Strauss, 1962). Traditional dichotomies as night and day have been paralleled by the ubiquity of populists' ideology: "pure people" and the "corrupt elite". As noted in chapter 2, the populist echoing of the people's voice is a preliminary definition of such leaders' anti-pluralistic and illusory impersonification. The persuasive "people vs. elite" rhetoric allows populists' symbolic enrichment through the gaining of the status of "sole representative", and thrives on the problematic and flexible depiction of society as homogenous. The cross-cultural discontent, which led to the silent majority's antagonism to the establishment, originated from technocracy's induced powerlessness sentiment. The inequality and contradictions brought about by hyperglobalization and the 2008 crisis exacerbated the people's need to restore control. Populism is the regime of the majority (Urbinati et. al, 2018). The neoliberal order's decline in legitimacy corresponds to the troubled consensus over values. Paradoxically, while capitalism's individualistic traits are being overturned, personal beliefs construct post-truth public opinions in the crises of knowledge. Technology is redefining knowledge, given excessive information, speed and fake news are causing individuals' refusal of reason. As the long-standing authority of all knowledge production logics crumbles due to distrust, individuals seek refuge in digital echo chambers of like-minded people; algorithms enhance these ideological safe spaces' sharing of alternative facts. Such arenas foster a fundamental populist trait: affect. This internship report's conceptual framework emphasizes how all information today can be politicized and is typically polarized. Emotionality prevents critical thinking and is furthered by populists' spectacle, the dismissing of dominant notions through the "us-them" narrative.

5000 refugees drowned in the Mediterranean in 2015 (Weiwei, 2017). Emotion does not equate to humanity, as populists often construct their representation through migrants' othering. Salvini's narrative of invasion generates consensus. A contra-

culture – an unethical group’s conflict with the dominant culture - is noticed in Italian populists’ oppositional notions, which travelled from being a revolt movement to an extremist Government. What the “immoral elite’ supposedly have always done, the populists will end up doing...with a democratic justification” (Müller, 2016: 49). Salvini’s anti-pluralist narrative of invasion purposefully enhances the crises of knowledge through a state of alarm. The M5S employ a demagogic spectacle as well, through the alleged restoration of dignity and thus control to people thanks to citizens’ income; and by eroding one of the Enlightenment’s conquests, science, through its anti-vaccine claims. The populist moment’s cancelling of debate through its simplification intensifies the need for epistemological individuals, intellectuals, and places, cultural institutions. Privilege is intrinsic to intellectuals’ societal role. Specifically, their truth-telling capabilities must be employed in the face of power. Intellectuals can decide whether to support mainstream values, however cannot ignore their responsibility.

Fondazione Feltrinelli, Fondazione Basso and Istituto Sturzo’s intellectualism demonstrate Italian cultural institutions’ employment of their privileged role to act as counter-hegemonic forces to populist ideals. Populism is in tension with agonistic dialogue, which is promoted by Fondazione Feltrinelli’s research, comparison of polyphonic views, interdisciplinarity, truth-seeking and historical references. To study, communicate and share guides the ideology of this educational, social and political institution, whose analysis and opposition to populism incremented with the establishment of the coalition. Whilst Fondazione’s political responsibility increased in Stagione Capitale, such acts in a holistic manner as a service to citizens: in line with individuals’ pre-election guidance through left and right lectures, it aims for democracy’s strengthening. Populism’s anti-conviviality is a symptom of democracy’s crisis and Fondazione posits the countering of the capitalist order will enhance democracy. The role of cultural institutions, given Italy’s emerging populism, is typically associated to a culture of enquiry and development of a plural common-sense, hence an educational duty shows. Fondazione Basso similarly to Feltrinelli utilizes the meeting of historical and contemporary fact-sharing references, while prioritizing the value of human rights in its debate. Istituto Sturzo has a specific scope within its educational purpose as well: its counter-hegemonic harmonizing practices and call-to-action occur through its comparison and contrast of populism

and popularism. Conversely, the Istituto Dignitatis Humanae is a formation school that hopes to form future populist gladiators through its crusade rhetoric, pluralistic paranoia and enlightened capitalism. Its state of crisis' "epistemological" role promotes an oxymoronic dignity, through pro-life and anti-Muslim credos. The institutions outlined in the Italian cultural landscape believe they bear the duty to nurture change through reflection in times of bewilderment, with the exception of the Istituto Dignitatis Humanae. Intellectuals must act as decent human beings and support values of peace, truth and freedom (Chomsky, 2011): what is the extent to which Italian cultural institutions have succeeded in developing convivial ideals within public opinion? While such research must continue, the current paper points to Fondazione Feltrinelli's key positioning among Italian institutions, given its epistemological ethos' promotion of democratic principles.

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