Territorial Identities in A New Europe:

The Rise of Lega Nord in Northern Italy

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Abstract

This paper argues that categories of nationhood are constructed in political processes. Rather than taking ethno-territorial minorities or national minorities as pre-existing and necessary conditions for political mobilization in European polities, these categories of belonging can be seen, in fact, as the outcome of political mobilization. I advance in this paper a different analytical framework to explain why and how categories of nationhood are constructed. The paper discusses and presents empirical evidence on the wave of political mobilization in the northern Italian regions that involved new claims of recognition for national minorities in the 1960s and 1970s, he formation of new associations and political parties in these regions and, later, the creation of Lega Nord. I show why and how Padania as a category of belonging was constructed and how political processes determined why some categories and not others became relevant for electoral competition in the Italian political system.

1. Introduction

Why are new political parties advancing claims of nationhood in Northern Italy? In recent years, the Padanian nation has become a vivid topic of discussion, a joke, a serious concern in political debates in Italy and in Europe. The birth of Padania in a public ritual celebrated in front—and for—the TV cameras in September 1996 marked a turning point in the rather confusing political history of regional political mobilization in Northern Italy. In the 1990s, a new party, Lega Nord, has become instrumental in the demise of the postwar Italian political system, denouncing the wrong-doings of the Italian state and the political class. Shortly after, Lega Nord moved beyond political protest and anti-state rhetoric to participate in the brief Berlusconi government, introducing federalism to the political agenda. Then Lega Nord left the Italian government, refused to enter political alliances and compromises, but survived predictions of electoral marginalization advocating secession from the Italian state.

"I am a European who lives in Padania." This assertion, like similar statements I gathered from party leaders, organizers and supporters of Lega Nord, raises fundamental questions about how we conceptualize the formation of identities and new claims of nationhood in Europe today. Scholars have stressed that the nationalism of Lega is a nationalism without a nation; identity is an excuse for advancing other preferences and needs (Melucci and Diani 1992). The starting point for these analyses is the lack of pre-existing "ethnic" identities in Northern Italy (Biorcio 1997). The claims advanced by other territorial minorities in Europe are treated as ethnic and authentic, whereas Lega Nord has fabricated a new nation that does not rely on pre-existing cultural differences or collective identities. The analytical distinction between identities as ethnic, pre-existing, and given, and identities as fake and fabricated, however, is not very useful. A substantial body of scholarly writing argues that, in fact, all identities are constructed and fabricated (Hobsbawm 1990, Anderson 1991).

Discarding as an anomaly the claims of nationhood does not help to explain why and how this invention came about. The presence of a party in Northern Italy that is publicly committed to independence and secession for "Padania" from the Italian state suggests that we have to take these claims of nationhood seriously. In the past territorial identities have been the object of political contestation and struggle in many European states. Institutional recognition for national and territorial minorities has been granted by governments and international agencies in the midst of public debates questioning the legitimacy of claims of nationhood and the

granting of collective rights upon this basis. Thus, we need an analytical framework that can take us beyond the question of invention to explain why, how and what identity is being constructed today in Northern Italy.

This paper does not argue against the idea of the Padanian nation as an invention. Rather, it sets a different agenda in exploring issues of identity, nationhood and political mobilization in European polities. I insert the rise of new movements and parties in Northern Italy within a comparative framework to study the formation of categories of nationhood. Rather than taking nations or ethnoterritorial minorities as pre-existing and necessary conditions for political mobilization (as cultural and rational choice approaches do), I propose here a different analytical framework. I suggest looking at these categories as the *outcome* of political mobilization. First, I highlight the importance of the institutionalization of the principle of congruence embedded in nationalism in national and international arenas and explore its uninteded consequences for new claims of nationhood and belonging (Brubaker 1996). I argue that, as the principle has increasingly been adopted by national and international norms, discourses of national belonging have become available and provide an avenue for mobilization on collective rights and autonomy (Soysal 1996). Second, I explain how categories of nationhood are constructed in political processes focusing on how political actors essentialize categories of belonging and present them as given. Sameness and diversity are constructed by defining inclusion and exclusion on the basis of cultural distinctiveness. The construction of categories of nationhood and their fate in the public sphere relies on the type of resources new political actors can mobilize and the existing political opportunity structure.

I argue in this paper that what characterizes the current formation of categories of belonging and nationhood in Northern Italy is not their invention or construction, but the extent to which this construction incorporates three main novelties. First, claims of belonging and nationhood have to be inserted within a new institutional scenario where the creation of the European Union is modifying the normative basis of political units (nation-states) and also providing new institutional avenues for claims-making. Second, constructing categories of nationhood in Europe today implies the introduction of new collective markers and traits of distinctiveness. Cultural distinctiveness and national essentialism shift from "ethnic" and linguistic to "civic" and economic. Third, electoral politics are more relevant for the formation of new categories of nationhood in European polities. As the electoral arena becomes the main locus of contention, the categories of belonging—the

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territorial boundaries, the content and markers of identity and the demands that are attached to claims of nationhood—become more and more fixed by electoral outcomes. In this paper, I substantiate these claims by providing empirical evidence on why and how Padania was constructed in Italy.

In the first part of the paper I present two approaches to studying nationhood and political mobilization and show how they underlie current explanations for the rise of Lega Nord. I introduce the approach advanced in this paper, focusing on institutional definitions of collectivities and why and how categories of belonging become the source of new political mobilization. Then, I show how "ethnicity" as the normative basis for claiming nationhood and demanding collective rights became the referent point for the movements and parties that demanded the recognition of national minorities in the European wave of political mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s. In the following section, I look into the Italian Constitutional framework and explain the distinction between "special" and "ordinary" regions introduced by the Constitution. I stress the importance of the institutional recognition of the German-speaking population of the province of Bolzano as an "ethnic" minority, protected under state and international provisions, to explain how it later shaped the claims of institutional recognition for new ethnic minorities in the 1960s and 1970s in Northern Italy. Dissatisfaction with the ordinary regions in Italy is considered as a precipitating condition for the revolt of the North (Putnam 1993, Kitschelt 1996). Instead, I show how demands of political autonomy in the ordinary regions of the North were shaped by claims of distinctiveness, "ethnicity" and nationhood to achieve autonomy.

Third, I link the question of nationhood with party formation by explaining the type of resources, strategies and political opportunities that led to the creation of Lega Nord and the construction of new categories of belonging. The new parties in the "ordinary" regions of Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont advanced claims of belonging and distinctiveness and demanded the institutional recognition of their "specialness". Strategies and resources shaped the ability of this multiplicity of regional actors to take advantage of political opportunities in the Italian political system. During the 1980s the parties in Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont followed very different electoral trajectories. I show how the organizational interdependence of the new parties in the ordinary regions of the North led to electoral coalitions and political alliances that shaped common views on the Northern identity. Lega Nord was formally launched only in 1991 as a coalition of regional parties. Here I focus on explaining why and how Padania as a category of belonging was constructed and

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how the electoral arena determined why some categories of belonging, and not others, were brought to the public sphere. I explain the political process by which Padania and the North, as opposed to Lombardy or Veneto, became the relevant categories of nationhood in Northern Italy.

2. Explaining Identity, Nationhood and Political Mobilization

Two distinctive approaches for explaining nationhood and political mobilization can be singled out. Culture and interests are presented as dichotomic and alternative sources of political mobilization. Cultural explanations saw political mobilization of national minorities in Europe on the basis of "ethnic" identities and cultural differences. Political mobilization represents a manifestation of the consciousness of territorial minorities with distinctive cultures that pre-exist processes of nation and state formation (Smith 1986). Theories advanced in the 1970s focused on the presence and survival of distinctive cultures vis-à-vis the dominant cultures of nation-states as the source for the political activation of pre-existing groups (Lijnhart 1977). Cultural differences in the form of language or religion provide the content and markers of collective identities. Ethnicity becomes a primary and overarching source of both individual and collective action.

In contrast, material explanations for studying identity and political mobilization highlight the instrumental nature of nationhood. Whether in Marxist or Rational choice theory, nationhood is concerned with collective interests. In Marxist approaches group subordination and internal colonies reflect the common interests of ethnic minorities (Hetcher 1975). Similarly, in rational choice approaches, ethnic groups are explained as coalitions of material interests, though individual rationality represents the driving force for ethnic mobilization (Bates 1983; Fearon and Laitin 1996). For the latter, ethnicity can be seen as one alternative way to mobilize and to pursue already defined collective interests. Individuals choose the identities that better serve their interests.

These two alternative approaches to looking at the linkages between nationhood and political mobilization can be found behind the existing explanations of the rise of Lega Nord in Italy. On the one hand, cultural approaches are brought to the fore to stress the anomalous nature of regional political mobilization in Northern Italy. Biorcio, Melucci and Diani emphasized the lack of ethnic potential in the Northern Italian regions to explain the rise of new parties (Biorcio 1991, Melucci and Diani 1992). Although, as I will show below, political activists in the 1970s highlighted the ethnic potential of Veneto, and some considered Northern

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Italians—Piedmonts, Lombards, Ligurians but not Venetians (Heraud 1963; 1992)—as ethnic minorities, the claims of the new regional parties emerging in the 1980s in the ordinary regions of the North are commonly treated as inventions by scholars because they are unsustained by ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. On this basis, scholars argue that identity cannot be the driving force behind political mobilization for Lega Nord. As I mentioned above, these are considered nationalisms without nations and identities are an excuse to advance other preferences (Melucci and Diani 1983: 168).

Material explanations are brought to the fore to explain what "other" preferences Lega Nord represents. At first hand, regional interests seem to provide a suggestive explanation for why there is a revolt in the North. Widespread regional socioeconomic disparities between North and South, a major theme in historical and contemporary writing on Italian politics, have been a structural feature of the Italian state since its creation (Gramsci 1992, Putnam 1993). The pervasiveness of regional disparities has defied the efforts of Italian governments to promote economic growth in the South during the entire postwar period (Trigilia 1992). The stereotyped image is that of an Italian North trapped in a bureaucratic and inefficient state and burdened by redistribution towards the South. The shift in the regional balance of economic and political power within Italy—from the problems of Southern economic backwardness towards the solution of the so-called Northern question—thus would reflect an opportunity to free the North from the Italian state under a new political and economic scenario marked by globalization and European integration.

These two alternative ways of looking at claims of nationhood and the formation of identities fail to provide a convincing explanation of why and how Padania as a category of nationhood, belonging and political participation exists today in the Italian political system. First, although theories on ethnoterritorial mobilization in Europe in the 1970s assumed that the rise of new movements and parties reflected pre-existing social units in the form of culturally distinctive, ethnoterritorial minorities and "dormant identities," this necessary condition has been subject to two major criticisms. In advanced industrialized societies, the assumption of distinctiveness and affinity among a people, a culture and a territory is less and less evident (Berger 1977, Linz 1985). Socioeconomic processes in Europe—migration, industrialization—make it extremely difficult to identify enclosed ethnic minorities with reified cultures. Moreover, major contributions in the fields of political anthropology, political science and sociology argue that all identities (in groups, nations and regions) are constructed and/or invented in social and political processes.

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Second, arguments on the material basis of the rise of Lega Nord also have major shortcomings. The consideration of the material interests of the Italian "North" as given and territorially bounded raises some fundamental questions about what the regional interests of Northern Italy are. Economic sociologists and political scientists argue that other territorial divisions have gained salience during the last decades, stressing the importance of territorial differences *within* North and South. In the 1970s, Bagnasco introduced the concept of Third Italy (the Center and North East regions of Italy) as a different socioeconomic model, characterized by the predominance of small firms operating in local networks and industrial districts and an export-oriented economy (Bagnasco 1977). Some scholars argue that, in fact, these are the interests behind the rise of Lega Nord (Trigilia 1994; Gobetti 1996), although these explanations cannot account for the lack of congruence between interests and electoral returns for Lega Nord in these areas. Though sharing the same type of economic model and regional interests, areas of the old Catholic subculture and Christian Democratic rule have represented the electoral strongholds for Lega Nord in the 1990s, whereas the red regions of Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna have remained outside the reach of the party. Finally, Lega Nord makes its claims of political autonomy—independence and secession—not only on the grounds of regional economic representation but also, and fundamentally, on the basis of a common identity and Northern nationhood. This type of analysis fails to explain why the material interests of the North and individual or collective utility functions are better served by a nationalist party inventing an identity than by a neoliberal party or an anti-tax revolt.[1]

Cultural and material approaches to nationhood and political mobilization assume that belonging, usually in the form of ethnicity, is a given. Despite these approaches diverging in the identification of the driving force of mobilization—identity or interests—they nevertheless both assume that groups are formed and pre-exist political mobilization. In this paper, I question the necessary condition established by these approaches—cultural and economic boundaries that enclose ethnic groups. I focus instead in providing an analytical framework to explain why and how categories of belonging and nationhood are constructed. I argue that new claims of nationhood in Europe have to be inserted within institutional frameworks that recognize the principle of congruence between a people and a territory embedded in

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[1] Though I don't discuss these arguments in this paper, my interviews with party organizers and representatives of Lega Nord showed very clearly that the representaiton of interests has not been the main rationale for the party representatives and organizers. From the point of view of party elites and cadres, Lega Nord is specialized in mobilizing and identity and not on representation.

domestic and international norms for national minorities. Nationalism, as defined by Hobsbawm and Gellner, is a principle of legitimacy which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990). The principle of congruence between a territory, a people and a culture is the basis for the recognition of political units (nation-states) and is encoded and institutionalized in the international system. The principle of congruence does not only apply to nations. The recognition in European pluralist democracies of ethnic minorities, historical nationalities, special regions, and ethnic groups represents the institutionalization of the principle of congruence, that is, that national units—whether bounded by a territory or not—are internally homogeneous and therefore must be granted political autonomy and self-determination. In European pluralist democracies, institutional categories provide the boundaries that couple a culture with a people and a territory and define the collectivities themselves (Soysal 1996).

Increasing institutionalization of the principle has made the language of belonging, nation and identity available in the public sphere. As Calhoun puts it, "most identity politics involves claims about categories of individuals who putatively share a given identity. . . categorial identities can be invoked and given public definition by individuals or groups even where they are not embodied in concrete networks of direct interpersonal relationships" (Calhoun 1995: 26). Territorial identities are categorical claims that couple a territory with a culture and a people, drawing boundaries of political and social inclusion and exclusion (Balibar 1991; Herzfeld 1992). While boundaries—whether territorially or socially defined—are fuzzy, and the content of identity is malleable, the basic claim—that one belongs to the collectivity—is not (Cohen 1985).

The institutionalization of the principle of congruence in nation-states and the international system provides the normative basis for the acquisition of collective rights—e.g., cultural or fiscal autonomy. The principle of congruence provides the legitimacy for demanding self-government and political autonomy (Soysal 1996; Brubaker 1996). Identity as a categorical statement about one's belonging to a nation provides the basis for claiming rights and make social, cultural, and economic demands in European democracies. Categorical claims of belonging can be advanced by a variety of political actors—associations, movements and political parties—to acquire institutional recognition and collective rights. However, political parties advancing claims of nationhood make belonging to a nation the organizing principle for political mobilization. Party formation takes national identity into the arena of electoral competition. Parties compete in elections for institutional recog-

nition of national minorities and their rights. The electoral success or failure of these parties is shaped by the strategies and resources upon which they mobilize and the existing opportunity structures in the political system. The erosion of the traditional cleavages that structured West European party systems provides the political opportunity structure to make categories of nationhood a successful basis for political mobilization and electoral competition in European democracies (Urwin 1983). Thus, political processes will define the categories of belonging that become relevant in the public sphere.

How is nationhood as a category of belonging constructed ? Constructing territorial identities is about neglecting differences within the territorial unit (internal sameness) and stressing differences with the other (diversity). Constructing identities is a process that essentializes properties of collectivities and groups— e.g., cultural differences. While these categories are constructed in historical processes, categorical identities are presented as essential and given because they give legitimacy to demands for self-government, rewriting the past as a historical precedent to explain present nationhood (Handler 1988).[2] Constructing identities is also a process that deconstructs pre-existing categories of belonging by historicizing their origins and contesting their legitimacy.

Political Mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s

This section explains why "ethnicity" became the normative basis for defining territorial minorities in the European wave of political mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s. In these two decades, European nation-states were challenged by a wave of political mobilization that brought about new claims for protection of national minorities and demands for regional autonomy and self-government in France, the U.K., Belgium, Italy and Spain. From this rediscovery of ethnic minorities, scholars drew a new analytical map in which Europe was no longer a set of nation-states but was multiethnic; multiethnic structures remain the rule (Esman 1977:26).[3]

For modernization theorists, the situation of the German-speaking minority of the South Tyrol represented a unique ethnic conflict in Western Europe in the

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[2]See Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988). On essentialism see also the essay by Craig Calhoun in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1994); and Michael Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[3]On the "ethnic revival" in Europe see the volume edited by Milton Esman, *Ethnic Conflict in the Western World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism. The Celtic Fringe in British National Development 1536-1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain. Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: NLB, 1977).

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first two decades after the war (Esman 1977). As Urwin put it: "Around 1960 the majority verdict of academia upon the violent and irredentist behaviour of the German-speaking population of the Alto Adige was probably that it was an atavistic intrusion into the placid water of Western politics: the prevailing belief was that nationalist agitation of this type was an anachronism in West Europe, the home of the nation-state" (Urwin 1983: 221). Although as I will show below, the German-speaking population in the province of Bolzano was granted political autonomy and special cultural and fiscal rights by the Italian state, regional political autonomy did not suppress political conflict in the region.[4] In the first decades after the war, the conflict over the political status of the German-speaking population of Bolzano—the South Tyrol question—received international attention through the negotiations of the Austrian and Italian governments, the participation of United Nations in mediating the dispute, and an outburst of terrorism during the 1960s.[5]

The approval of the new statute for the region—after the SVP in its 1969 extraordinary congress voted affirmatively for its adoption—took place in the midst of a wave of ethnoterritorial mobilization across Europe.[6] The compromise solution to the problem of South Tyrol in the early 1970s was again considered to be an anomaly with respect to European trends. As Peter Katzenstein puts it:

> Contemporary Western European politics has recently been marked by an astonishing revival of ethnic political conflict. States that in earlier centuries had faced their crisis of national integration and that only a decade ago were involved in a process of supranational integration are now confronted with ethnic conflict and disintegration at the sub-national level. South Tyrol is the only area where developments have moved in the opposite direction. (Katzenstein 1977: 287)

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[4]The SVP (Sudtiroler Volkspartei) considered insufficient the provisions introduced in the special statute of the region and denounced their lack of implementation. The Austrian government sent a memorandum to the Italian government in 1956 denouncing the lack of implementation of the Paris Treaty. In its 1957 Congress, the Sudtiroler Volskpartei renewed its claims for Austrian help, denouncing the policies of the Italian government against effective regional autonomy and the "forced" migration of Italians into the region. In 1959, the party would create a major institutional crisis removing its representatives from the regional *giunta*.

[5]A resolution of the United Nations in October 31, 1960, called for direct negotiation between both countries (no. 1497[XV]). Yet the Austrian government considered its negotiations with the Italian government unsatisfactory and reintroduced the question of the German-speaking population of Bolzano again in July 1961. Then, the Italian government established the so-called "Commission of 19" to draft a new system of political autonomy for the region, known as *il pacchetto*.

[6]A new statute reducing the functions of the region in favor of the autonomous provinces of Bolzano and Trento was formally approved in January 1972 (Agostini 1986).

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A Europe-wide wave of political mobilization occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s. Political mobilization took place across European borders in France, Spain, Belgium, the U.K. and Italy, and involved new movements and parties which demanded institutional recognition of national minorities. The novelty of this wave of political mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s was the extent to which the new movements and parties shared similar discourses, ideologies and programs across the borders of European states. These new political actors also created neworks of collaboration and cooperation, worked together in European congresses, signed common declarations and coordinated their political activities (Salvi 1975; Guruz Jauregui Bereciartu 1981; Lafonte 1974).

This European wave of political mobilization for the recognition of territorial identities was "ethnic" in nature. Ethnicity provided the legitimacy for making demands for institutional recognition for national minorities in the political system. Thus, the other main novelty of the wave of political mobilization in Northern Italy was the rise of ethnic definitions that were coupled to claims of collective recognition. In contrast to prewar regionalist and nationalist parties that claimed nationhood—such as Catalan or Scottish nationalism—"ethnism" and ethnic minorities defined the territorial identities emerging in the 1970s. "Ethnism" profoundly influenced the ideologies of territorial movements and parties in Europe from the 1960s onwards.[7]

In the midst of the decolonization process that took place in the 1960s and transformed the international arena through the creation of new states in Africa and Asia, self-determination—and ethnicity as the relevant criterion for granting it—became a powerful normative basis for claims for institutional recognition in European pluralist democacies. The latter were bound by both national and international norms to protect of minorities and in the 1960s and 1970s they faced demands for recognition of ethnic and cultural pluralism within their boundaries. Ethnicity was the relevant criterion for claiming recognition (by groups and movements) and for granting it (by states and international agencies). According to Esman,

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[7]François Fontan's *Ethnisme. Vers Un Nationalisme Humaniste* (1961), Guy Heraud's *L'Europe des Ethnies* (1963)—the Bible of "ethnonationalists"—and Federico Krutvig, under the name of Fernando Sarrailh de Ihartza, *Vasconia. Estudio Dialectico di una Nacionalidad* (1963) became fundamental points of reference for the new movements and parties. For the importance of the distinction between "ethnie" and "nation" for Sagredo and his influence in ETA ideology, see Gurutz Jauregui Bereciartu. *Ideologia y Estrategia politica de ETA. Analisis de su Evolucion entre 1959 y 1968*. Siglo XXI de Espana. Editores. S.A. Madrid 1981; Robert P. Clark, *The Basque Insurgents. ETA 1952-1980*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). pp. 34ff. For a negative view on Vasconia, see Gregorio Moran. *Los Espanoles que dejaron de serlo. Euskadi 1937-1981*. (Madrid: Planeta, 1982), pp. 284ff.

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ethnoregionalism is endowed with a strong normative resource, based on the continuing legitimacy of the concepts of popular sovereignty and self-determination, on the diminishing appeal of traditional patriotism, and on the demystification of the centralized state. Indeed, so compelling are the normative claims of ethnic self-determination that nowhere in contemporary Europe have regional grievances been successfully politicized except where they enjoy an ethnic base. (Esman 1977: 377)

Ethnicity would provide the underlying criterion for identifying and protecting national minorities. In these years, emerging associations and organizations at the European level aimed to expand the protection of the ethnic minorities of, and in, Europe. The Federal Union for European Nationalties was originally founded in 1950. The Union was open to "all the democratic organizations for ethnic defense," and aimed at coordinating the activities of national and linguistic minorities and adopting a charter for the rights and protection of minorities. In addition, the organization dedicated its activities to groups "who lacked international protection, in order to follow the evolution of the situation of minority groups and to call attention of European governments and the European Parliament to their situation" (Heraud: 1963: 283-284).[8] The journal of the association, *Europa Ethnica*, became the mouthpiece of national minorities in Europe. The presentation of the journal states:

> *Europa Ethnica* has chiefly scientific aims. . . . What the editors consider most important is to examine and explain the juridical and sociological situation and the legitimate claims of European national groups in their struggle for their natural rights within a consolidated Europe, as is most widely coveted, and to help to create an international national group law. This is doubtless a political issue and a rightful cause if defended by fair means. . . .[9]

New international organizations, such as *L'Association Internationale des Langues et Cultures Menacées*, did not confine their activities to legal recognition and protection of minorities, but also actively sought the revival of minority languages

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[8] According to article 2 of the statutes of the Federalist Union of Ethnic Communities in Europe: "for ethnic community in the sense of article 1, we mean a community which is manifested for the *caractères de base* such as language, culture and its own traditions' (Statut de L'Union Fédéraliste Des Communautés Ethniques Européennes (*Europa Ethnica* 4\1967, p189 yss). For the statutes of the Federal Union see *Europa Ethnica* 4\1967: 189ff).

[9] *Europa Ethnica*. Virteljahresschrift fur Nationalitatenfragen. Mit offiziellen Mitteilungen der "foderalistischen Union Europaischer Volksgruppen." Revue Trimestrielle des Questions Ethniques. Contenant aussi des Communiqués officiels de "l'Union Fédéraliste des Communautés Ethniques Européennes." A Quarterly Review for Problems of Nationality. Containing Official News of the "Federal Union of European Nationalities." Wilhelm Braumuller. Universitats. Verlagsbuchhandlung. Wien IX Stuttgart 1961. Editors are Guy Heraud, johann Wilhelm Mannhardt, Povl Skadegard and Theodor Veiter.

and cultures in Europe.[10] In the 1970s CIEMEN (Centro Internazionale Escarre sulle Minoranze Etniche e Nazionali) provided a forum for legitimation and contestation of the situation of ethnic minorities in Europe.[11]

For political activists, ethnicity was natural and unproblematic. For Heraud, "the *ethnie* is a collectivity presenting certain common distinctive characteristics of language, culture and civilization" (Heraud 1963: 23).[12] Among the objective differences identified by the ethnicists to identify an ethnic minority, the existence of a language provided the most self-evident manifestation of distinctiveness and a clear-cut criterion for identifing ethnic minorities. According to Heraud, "the language transmits a culture, reflects a sensitivity, becomes the sanctuary of ethnic values" (Heraud 1963: 44).[13] For ethnicists and political activists, political organization was secondary. Ethnic minorities were ethnic *and* minorities although they differed in the degree of consciousness they exhibited (see Salvi 1975). In their view, ethnic mobilization would follow an evolutionary trajectory, from ethnic and cultural distinctiveness to consciousness to political assertion (Sagredo de Ihartza 1977).

In the 1960s and 1970s, a proliferation of taxonomies on European ethnic and national minorities presented as given what was, instead, the result of an arbitrary classificatory process.[14] Despite the "naturalness" with which ethnicity as a criterion for identifying minorities was presented, many political debates in the 1960s and 1970s in Europe actually focused on which relevant markers, which cultures and collectivities, were "ethnic." These debates were not only about the boundaries of the collectivities, groups, or linguistic minorities, but also about their definition as "ethnic." Without institutional recognition of ethnic distinctiveness, no system of protection and rights could be granted. Thus, I suggest looking at political mobilization during these decades as a process about the institutional definition of minorities as "ethnic." Institutional recognition provided the relevant criterion for defin-

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[10]As the letter of intention to constitute the Association put it: "We have the intention to proceed to the rescue of the languages and cultures (now while there is still time) and to favor their development and 'normalization'. For that reason, we wish to group in a common movement those who, a bit everywhere, bring forward the defense of their own language and own ethnic culture" (*Europa Ethnica* 1\1964, p.82).

[11] It was based in Milano and today its secretariat is in Barcelona.

[12]Heraud included race or "biological" traits in the first edition of *Europe des Ethnies* (1963) which were eliminated from the 1993 edition of the book.

[13]Or as Fontan put it: "the linguistic index is the expression of a differentiation of character and mentality, the synthetic result of radical social, economic and political development of humanity which has operated in different ways depending on the territories" (Fontan 1961, 16).

[14]For classifications see Heraud 1963; Fontan 1960; Salvi 1970; Sagredo de Ihartza 1973.

ing categories of belonging as ethnic and national, reifying the boundaries that coupled a people with a culture and a territory. Whether we identify these collectivities as ethnic minorities or groups, national minorities or nations, depends on the different system of institutional recognition that reifies the categories and establishes membership, and not on the substantive nature of these collectivities.[15]

In the postwar period, European states combined the signing of international agreements with legal provisions for recognizing and protecting ethnic groups, linguistic minorities and historical nationalities. The next section introduces the Italian Constitutional provisions established after the war and explains the institutionalization of ethnicity as the basis for the acquistion of collective rights. The specialness of the South Tyrol—recognized as an ethnic minority by international agencies and the Italian state— defined the region's access to a special system of cultural and fiscal autonomy. As I will show latter, claims of ethnicity by new movements and associations in the Northern regions of Italy in the 1960s and 1970s were shaped by the ethnic status of the German- speaking population of Bolzano and its collective rights granted by the Italian state.

Categorical Claims and Institutional Boundaries in Postwar Italian Politics

After the Second World War, West European states underwent two fundamental changes that proved stable during the postwar period: the fixing of their territorial boundaries, and the creation and consolidation of stable democratic regimes. After the war, the Italian state had to address the question of the status and rights of the minorities in the borders with Yugoslavia (the city of Trieste and the zone of Istria), Austria (the irredentism of the German-speaking population of the provice of Bolzano in the South Tyrol) and France (the French-speaking minority of Val d'Aosta). The new Italian democracy attempted to solve the problem of territorial boundaries with the introduction of constitutional provisions for the border territories.

Article 114 of the Italian Constitution states: "The Republic is divided in Regions, provinces and communes." The postwar Italian Constitution introduced a two-tier regional system that distinguished between "special" and "ordinary" regions. In its title V—on the organization of the Italian state structure—article 116 of the Italian Constitution grants political autonomy to five special regions; Article

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[15]See in contrast Smith (1986, 199). For the author, "within European states there are both *ethnie* and nations: on the one hand, fully-fledged nations like Catalonia, Scotland and Flanders, and on the other hand, ethnic communities like the Galicians in Spain or the Sorbs in Eastern Germany" (Smith 1986: 129).

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116 reads: "To Sicily, Sardinia, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Val d'Aosta are attributed particular forms and conditions of autonomy according to special statutes with constitutional laws."[16] The creation of ordinary regions was justified on the grounds of political decentralization and pluralism within the Italian state. While the implementation of the special regions—except for Friuli Venezia Giulia—was immediately undertaken, the implementation of the ordinary regions had a conflictual and interrupted history and was delayed for twenty years.[17] After the war, the Christian Democratic party favored decentralization and the creation of the ordinary regions as part of its corporatist approach. However, their introduction was paralyzed by fear of Communist control of the "red" regions of Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany. Finally, at the end of the 1960s the question of the regional governments was reintroduced, and legislation was enacted to implement the election of regional governments and the creation of the regions in the early 1970s (Gourevitch 1978).[18]

Distinctiveness was the single criterion for granting territorial autonomy in the Italian state classificatory system to five regions. However, distinctiveness was defined in each region according to different principles. The specialness of Trentino-Alto Adige was singled out on ethnic grounds. Already in 1946, before the Italian Constitution was written, the Italian and Austrian governments signed an internal agreement for the equal rights and protection of the ethnic minority in the province of Bolzano, which became known as the De Gasperi-Gruber agreeement. The first clause of the agreement reads:

> German-speaking inhabitants of Bolzano province and of the neighboring bilingual townships of Trento province will be assured of a complete equality of rights with the Italian-speaking inhabitants within the framework of special provisions to safeguard the ethnic character and the cultural and economic development of the German-speaking element.[19]

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[16]*Constituzione della Repubblica Italiana* (Rimini: Maglioli Editore, 1995).

[17]In fact, the lack of regional reform generated some movements during the 1950s in the regions of the North claiming regional autonomy. The Movimento Autonomista Regione Piemonte born in 1952-1953 which elected some local councilors in the city of Torino, died in 1956 and expanded to Lombardy and Veneto. Also in the 1950s, there was an autonomist movement in the province of Bergamo (Movimento Autonomista Bergamasco), which was the first one to use the symbol of Alberto the Guissano.

[18]The first regional governments were elected in 1970 and started to operate in 1972. A package of new regulations, 1975 Law 382 and the 616 decrees in 1977, effectively decentralized a set of functions into the hands of regional governments (Putnam 1993).

[19]The De Gasperi-Gruber Agreement on the Alto Adige. The Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Rome1960, p14. The text of the agreement was inserted in the Peace Treaty, Annex IV (the

Thus, the speciality of the Trentino-Alto Adige region was shaped by institutional recognition of an ethnic minority. The Constitutional Law of February 5\1948 contains the Special Statute for the Trentino-Alto Adige. Article 2 of the Special Statute establishes: "In the region all citizens shall enjoy equal rights irrespective of the linguistic group to which they belong, and their respective ethnic and cultural characteristics shall be guaranteed."

Despite their common status as special regions, the normative framework for the new five regions was based on different principles. The other four statutes did not contain provisions for the protection of ethnic minorities. The special statute for Val d'Aosta (Legge constituzionale February 1948\n.4) refers neither to linguistic nor ethnic minorities. In its article 48, the statute broadly established that "the Italian and French languages are equal in Val d'Aosta" (Lenguereau 1961).[20] Autonomy for Sicily and Sardinia was granted for geographic and political considerations (the emergence of separatist movements that failed to consolidate in the post-war period). Finally, the special statute of Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Legge constituzionale della Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia, January 1963.n1) was the last one to be adopted, in 1963. Parliamentary debates about special status for the region focused both on the question of the geographical boundaries of the new region—whether to create one or two separate regions (Friuli and Venezia-Giulia) or one region with two autonomous provinces (such as Trentino-Alto Adige) and on the criteria for specifying the "distinctiveness" of the region.[21] Finally, the special statute of 1963 recognized no special conditions of the region within the Italian state nor introduced specific measures to protect its linguistic minorities (Agnelli 1987; Bertolissi 1987).

Italian Constitutional provisions were invoked in the wave of political mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s in Northern Italy. The next section shows how claims-making was shaped by available institutional frameworks—the distinctive-

Allied and Associated Powers have taken note of the provisions agreed upon by the Austrian and Italian Governments on September 5th 1946).

[20] Title VI of the statute introduces some provisons for the use of the French language in schools and public administration in the region.

[21] The debates over territorial boundaries included Friuli, Giulia and the statute of the city of Trieste, which under the Paris Treaty was considered a "free territory under international supervision" (Ginsborg, p110) (Zone A under British and American supervision). In 1948, the United States, Great Britain and France promised that Trieste would return to Italian rule. (Bertolissi 1987, pp. 78-79). Criteria about the specialness of the region were divided. On the one hand, some wanted to recognize the plurilingual character of the region and the presence of minorities— Slovenians and Ladinians. On the other hand, some stressed that special status should be granted for strategic considerations, international conditions and the nature of the region as a "double" border with Yugoslavia and the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe.

ness of the ethnic minority in the province of Bolzano—that incorporate institutional recognition of a national minority within Italian borders. The unintended consequences of the institutionalization of the principle of congruence is that these institutional frameworks are increasingly "uncoupled" from the original collectivities to which institutional boundaries were introduced by the new political mobilization of groups, movements and parties claiming recognition for their own distinctiveness. In the 1960s and 1970s in Northern Italy claims of ethnic status and collective rights involved not only the other special regions of Val d'Aosta and Friuli-Venezia Giulia but also the ordinary regions of Piedmont, Veneto and Lombardy.

Mobilizing on Ethnicity in Northern Italy

The European wave of political mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s involved old and new groups, associations and parties in the Northern Italian regions. These political actors advanced claims for protection and recognition of minorities. Three main elements shaped their claims and their mobilization. First, claims of recognition were increasingly shaped by ethnicity. Cultural distinctiveness would provide the criteria for defining ethnic collectivities. Second, ethnic status provided minorities with a principle of legitimacy sanctioned by the Italian state and the international system. The structure of incentives for claims-making was provided by the political trajectory of the German-speaking population of Bolzano and the recognition of its ethnic status. Third, claims of institutional recognition for ethnic groups and minorities were advanced by a multiplicity of political actors: associations, movements and political parties. During these years the traditional Italian parties would have a dominant position in the political system, but at the end of the 1970s the political opportunity structure was slowly changing. Thus, representation of minorities would move from associations and groups lobbying institutional actors to autonomous organization of political parties seeking to advance their programs in the electoral arena.

What were the Italian "ethnic" minorities? In the 1960s and 1970s, cultural revival was considered by ethnicists a first step in the process of ethnic awareness and institutional recognition of ethnic status. Cultural distinctiveness provided the relevant criterion for identifying ethnic minorities. During the 1960s and 1970s new associations, groups and political movements demanded the recognition and protection of linguistic distinctiveness and minority languages within the borders of the Italian state. Some associations for the protection of regional cultures and languages

and the promotion of poetry and theater in the vernacular had a historical record dating back to the beginning of the century, such as the *Societa Filologica Friuliana*. Others were newly born in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Occitanist Escolo do Pou in Piedmont (Salvi 1975).

The emphasis on linguistic recognition of regional languages represented a first step in the assertion of ethnic distinctiveness. Having a language, as opposed to a dialect, marked the dividing line between the recognition of a collectivity and its ethnic status. As Gremmo wrote:

> it has been often remarked (properly) that language is the synthetic index of nationhood, of a people, of a *ethnie*. It is therefore evident how the valorization of the language means a first step towards a more general valorization of other features (cultural in a broader sense) that participate (or collaborate) in determining the specificities of a particular ethnic group (Gremmo 1975, Assion Piemonteisa, Anno IV, Novembre, Dicembre 1975, "In Difesa della Lingua. Indice Sintetico di Una Nazionalita"

The Italian section of the AIDLCM provided a framework for new activists to claim official recognition of regional languages *as* languages and not dialects.[22] The AIDLCM battled in the 1970s for recognition of linguistic minorities in Italy. The AIDLCM had as its main goal the creation of a legal framework to specify and protect them under article 6 of the Italian Constitution. The Italian Constitution establishes the protection of linguistic minorities, although it does not specify what the linguistic minorities in Italy are.[23] Article 1 of the AIDLCM proposal was the following: "according to article 6 of the Constitution, Albanians, Catalans, Croats, French, French-Provencal, Friulians, Greeks, Ladinians, Occitans, Sardinians, Slovenes, Germans and Gypsies are linguistic minorities" (*Europa Ethnica* 3\1974). The AIDLCM also requested the introduction of articles for the protection of linguistic minorities within the statutes of the new ordinary regions of Piedmont, Molise, Basilicata and Calabria.[24]

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[22]The Societa Filologica veneta became the nucleus for the formation of Liga Veneta, belonged to the AIDLCM. Salvi also mentions the creation of a section of the AIDLCM in Lombardy in 1975 (sezione Lombardia, Ticini e Grigioni) with the scope of "constituting a Lombard *microkone* valid in all the territories of the same dialect, and then, to subsequently propose it as the the constitutive nucleus of a 'Padanian' nationhood whose linguistic consciousness is *just starting to breathe*. They talked about a Padanian ethnie or a Galic-italian ethnie, excluding so far the *parlate Venete*" (Salvi 1975, p. 9).

[23]Article 6 of the Italian Constitution does not specify which the linguistic minorities in Italy are. It reads: "The Republic protects with appropriate norms the linguistic minorities." (*Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana e Leggi sulla Corte Costituzionale*. Maggioli Editore 1995.).

[24]The proposal of the AIDLCM included four "ordinary regions": Piedmont (minorities, German, French-Provencal, French, or Occitans); Molise (minorities: Albanese and Croats), Basilicata

Table 1 presents five alternative classifications of the Italian minorities during the 1970s. The taxonomies differ both in the criteria which define the minorities and the identification of the existing minorities within Italy's borders.

Table 1: The Italian Minorities: Competing Classification Criteria

Heraud (1)	AIDLCM (2)	Salvi (3)	Sagredo de Ihartza (4)	Pellegrini (5)
Ethnic Minorities Valdostans Rheto-romans or Ladinians: •Grisons •Dolomitans •Friulians Slovens Sud-tyroleans Northern Italians •Piedmonts •Ligurians •Emilians •Lombards •non Venetians Sardinians Sicilians Albanians Greeks	**Linguistic Minorities** Albanians Catalans Croats French French-provenzal Friulians Greeks Ladinians Occitans Sardinian Slovenes Germans Gypsies	**Territorial-Linguistic Minorities** Albanians Catalans French Greeks Ladinians: •Dolomitiche •Friulians Occitans Sardinians Serbocroats Slovenes Germans **'Forbidden Nations'** Sardinians Friulians	**Ethnies** Sards Harpitains Piedmonts Friulians Occitans **Minorities from Other States** Germans Slovens Greeks Albanians	**National Minorities** Sud-tyroleans Slovens **Linguistic Minorities** Val d'Aostans ('Elected' Minority) Ladinians (Bolzano) **Regional Dialects** Ladino Friuliano Sardo **Linguistic Pockets** Albanians Greeks Franco-provenzal Occitan Serbocroats Germans Gypsies

Sources, my elaboration from:
1. Heraud, *L'Europe des Ethnies* 1963,1992
2. Proposal of the Associazione per la Difesa delle Lingue e Culture Minacciate,1974
3. Sergio Salvi, *Le Lingue Tagliate*,1975
4. Sagredo de Ihartza, *Vasconie ou L'Europe Nouvelle*,1975
5. Giovanni Battista Pellegrini, *Minoranze e Culture Regionali*. CLESP, Padova 1986.

The classifications in Table 1 reflect the different criteria for identifying the collectivity or the group. Some minorities were considered ethnic by most of the authors, but the minority and ethnic status of other collectivities was hotly contested for others. For instance, the recognized ethnic minority of South Tyrol is not an *ethnie* nor a minority in Sagredo's work—it is part of the German *ethnie*—but is the ethnic minority *par excellence* in the rest of the authors. In contrast, for Heraud the French-speaking minority in Val d'Aosta is an ethnic minority; is neither French-speaking nor a minority for Sagredo (it belongs to a broader Harpitania); for Pellegrini is not a natural but chosen French-speaking minority because they in fact

(Albanese) and Calabria 9 (Greek and Albanese) (see *Europa Ethnica* 2\1971 p 81-82) . For the request in Piedmont see Brodero and Gremmo 1978.

speak a *patois* (Pellegrini). Moreover, the Ladinians of Trentino-Alto Adige are a recognized linguistic minority by the special statute of the region, but not the Ladinians in Friuli-Venezia Giulia; Pellegrini challenges completely the assertion that Ladinians speak a language, because it should be considered a dialect or variant of the Italian language. For Salvi and the Italian section of AIDLCM, Occitans should be considered an Italian linguistic minority, for Heraud and Sagredo they are not (for the former Occitans are in Southern France, for the latter they are an invented *ethnie*).

Efforts to mobilize and organize during the 1960s and 1970s were the result of increasing institutionalization (the regionalization process in the ordinary regions and creation of the special region of Friuli Venezia Giulia and new opportunities in the Italian political system that led to the creation of new parties by the end of the 1970s in the ordinary regions of the North). Political mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s involved the creation of new movements and parties or the reactivation of old parties such as Union Valdotaine. The first region to become involved in ethnic claims and demands for collective rights was Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The approval of the statute of special region in 1963 led to reorganization and creation of new parties and movements for representation of the Slovenian and Friulian minorities of the region (Salvi 1975). In Val d'Aosta, renewed claims for protection came from existing parties but also from new political organizations that lamented the lack of ethnic status for the French-speaking minority. In Val d'Aosta, the absence of ethnicity as the legitimizing principle for granting collective rights to the region was considered to be the product of the weakness of its political class, which did not exert enough pressure on the Italian government, and the lack of international support by the French government (see Cuaz Chatellier 1971 and the introduction to the volume by Guy Heraud). In both special regions, conservative or regional parties or groups coexisted with new organizations that incorporated European currents on ethnism and denounced internal colonialism and the oppression of the Italian state.

New movements and parties, however, also mobilized in the "ordinary" region of Piedmont. Demands for recognition and protection of ethnic minorities had also come from the ordinary region of Piedmont in the 1960s and 1970s. The "voluntary exile" of Francois Fontan, the founder of the *Parti Nationaliste Occitaine*, led to the formation of a Movimento Autonomista Occitano in 1968. According to Salvi, 'Fontan exported in the valleys the idea of an Occitan nation and linked the linguistic alienation of the Italian Occitans with their economic, social and cultural alienation (Salvi, 1973: 171). MAO demanded the creation of a region with

special status for all the *occitaniche cisalpine* valleys in Piedmont.[25] In 1975 the journal *Assion Piemonteisa* launched an appeal for the creation of a League of the Alps to would include Val d'Aosta, Piemonte and some provinces of Liguria, and a gathering of autonomist movements with common goals "for the defense of an *ethnie*, a language, the search for autonomy and also the defense of a threat to identity oppressed by the centralized politics of the state" (*Assion Piemonteisa*, Anno VI 1975). Roberto Gremmo, one of the early activists in Piedmont and founder of the *Movimento Autonomista Rinascita Piemonteisa*, unsuccessfully attempted to organize groups in Lombardy and Veneto as early as 1973.[26] Table 2 summarizes the scattered evidence on the cultural associations and political groups active in these regions in the 1960s and 1970s.

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[25] Brodero was a member of the Escolo do Pou, a cultural association created in 1961 for the promotion of the Occitan language, active in Piedmont and Val d'Aosta (Salvi 171).

[26] In a personal interview, Gremmo said that he didn't find anybody in Lombardy and in Veneto in the early 1970s, though in the latter region he met a worker with whom he launched a regional journal, *Veneto Libero* (as he described it, the idea was to produce a journal "a bit ethnic and a bit new left") which died after the second issue.

Table 2: Cultural Associations and Political Groups in the 1970s

REGIONS	CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS Regional and Ethnic	POLITICAL GROUPS AND PARTIES
Val d'Aosta	French: Academie de St. Anselme Comite des Traditions Valdotaines La Societe de la Flore French-provencal: Escolo do Pou Centres des Etudes franco-provencals.	Union Valdotaine Union Democratique Valdotaine Rassemblement Valdotain Unione Valdotaine Progressiste HEL (Harpentaya Etnokrateka Libera) ALPA (Akson Liberaxon Peeple Alpee), P.P.H. (Partito Popolare Arpitano)
Piedmont	Occitanists: Escolo do Pou Coumboscuro Piedmontists: Compania dij Brande	Occitanists: MAO (Movimento Autonomista Occitano; UDAVO (Unione degli Autonomisti delle Valli Occitane). Piedmontists: Assion Piemontes, Assosiassion Liber Piemont
Trentino Alto-Adige	Bolzano: Sudtiroler Kulturinstitut Sudtiroler Kunstlerbund Trento:	Sudtiroler Volkspartei Partito Popolare Trentino Tirolese
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Friulians: Societa Filologica Friuliana Scuole Libere Friuliane Int Furlan Slovenians: Slovenska prosveta Zveza slovenske Katliske prosvete	Movimento Friuli Movimento friuli Indipendente Slovenska Skupnost (Unione Slovena) Slovenska Levica (Sinistra Slovena)

Sources:
1. Sergio Salvi, *Le Lingue Tagliate*.
2. Sagredo de Ihartza, *Vasconie ou l'Europe nouvelle*.

The new movements of the 1960s and 1970s in these regions shared the emphasis on ethnicity as the relevant definition of minorities with distinctive cultures. Demands for institutional recognition were all shaped by distinctiveness and ethnic status, such as the one granted to the ethnic minority in the Trentino Alto Adige. In contrast to conservative, regional associations and parties for whom cultural distinctiveness is a historical legacy to be preserved, ethnic associations and parties want the protection of minorities and the granting of rights of self-determination and autonomy upon the basis of cultural distinctiveness. Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s was part of the language and opening of the left in Europe. All these ethnic movements and parties incorporated the discourse of colonialism and shaped their grievances as internal colonies of the Italian state.

Efforts to organize and mobilize over ethnic claims multiplied in the late 1970s. In 1977 a meeting of political parties and movements resulted in a "federation of minorities." The founding members of this federation were Movimento Friuli (MF), Movimento Occitano-Provenzale (M.O.P), Partito del Popolo Trentino Tirolese (P.P.T.T.), Slovenska Skupnost (S.Sk.), Sud Tiroler Volkspartei (S.V.P) and Union Valdotaine (U.V.). As the program put it, these were "autonomist parties which represent and aim to protect the Friulian, Ladinian, Occitan, Slovenian, German and Valdostan, ethnolinguistic communities." The political goals of the federation were the "development of the ethnic and linguistic characteristics of our own people and their cultural, economic and social interests within the framework of a political federalism in Europe" (Minoranze n 6-7: 57, CIENEM 1977). In 1978, the creation of *L'Unione Ossolana per l'Autonomia* in Piedmont and the visibility the movement acquired at the local level brought about the solidarity of the autonomists in Piedmont.[27]

The political opportunity structure was slowly changing, opening some avenues for new parties to compete in elections. At the end of the 1970s the erosion of the traditional Italian parties was becoming visible. The Christian Democratic party and its governmental allies had been in power for the entire postwar period, but the traditionally excluded Communist party had also, during the 1970s, become a governmental party.[28] The creation of an anti-party platform *Lista por Trieste* or, as it was widely known, *il Melone*, in the city of Trieste showed the electoral potential of protest politics against traditional parties in the late 1970s. The political revolt had its origins in a group of intellectuals and politicians who felt betrayed by the provisions included in the Treaty of Ossimo signed by the Italian and Yugoslavian governments in 1975. (Cecovini 1985).[29] The list competed in local elections for

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[27]In Piedmont, L'Unione Ossolana per l'Autonomia was born in 1978. The UOPLA was an autonomist movement at the provincial level which claimed the autonomy of Val d'Ossola in the province of Novara. At the beginning UOPA was a trasversal movement to all political parties. Later it became an independent political movement. This is not an isolated case. As far as I know there are at least two other attempts during this period to create autonomist movements of this kind. In Veneto, in the province of Belluno, the movement for the autonomy of Belluno. In Lombardy, in the province of Varese, Bossi launched *L'Unione Nord-Occidentale per i Laghi pre-Alpini*, though in his books he changed its name to *'L'Unione Nord-Occidentale per l'Autonomia*. .

[28]As Gourevitch points out, the regional elections of June 15, 1975, changed Italian political life. The Communist party emerged from these elections as the largest party in every major city of Italy (Rome, Turin, Milan, Venice, Florence, Naples, Bologna) and the largest party in seven regions, thirty-four provinces and twenty-six provincial capitals. Beyond the three regions of the red belt (Umbria, Tuscany and Emilia-Romanga) the left gained control of Liguria, the Marches, and Piedmont (Gourevitch 1978: 54).

[29]The city of Trieste itself was part of the zone A (a free territory under international supervision: "il Territorio Libero di Trieste"), though it was returned to Italy by the allies. In 1954 the London

the first time in 1978, electing the new mayor on a ticket that claimed to defend the city from traditional parties.

The first European elections of 1979 marked a turning point in the development of movements and parties in the Northern Italian regions. One of the leaders of Union Valdotaine, Bruno Salvadori, decided to put together a common list of autonomists in order to gain representation in the European parliament. In 1979, Union Valdotaine presented itself as a confederate union of parties and autonomist movements, federalists, regional forces and independents for a Europe of "autonomies, progress and freedom."[30] The list put together by Union Valdotaine incorporated groups and associations from the special regions of Val d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Union Valdotaine, Partito Popolare Trentino Tirolese, Union Slovena and Movimento Friuli), and groups from the ordinary regions of Veneto, Piedmont and Lombardy (including candidates from Liga Veneta, Rinascita Piemontese, Movimento Autonomista Occitano, Coumboscuro (Movimento di autonomia e civilta provenzale alpina) and the Partito Federalista Europeo of Mantova). As I will show below, the prospect of European integration became relevant not only for defining the criteria of inclusion and exclusion and the new categories of belonging and nationhood, but also for redefining the strategies of the new regional parties. This new political scenario shaped the choice of political activists in Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont to organize and they started to compete in elections in the early 1980s. The next section looks at the formation of these parties, the new categories of belonging and nationhood they advanced for the recognition of their ethnic status and distinctiveness, and the anti-state and anti-party rhetoric that informed their strategies and political programs.

Ordinary into Special: Nationhood and Party Formation in Northern Italy

Political parties advancing claims of nationhood make belonging to a nation the organizing principle for political mobilization and electoral competition. Liga

Memorandum established by the Italian and Yugoslavian governements recognized the separate administration of Zone A (Italy) and Zone B (Yugoslavia, distributed between Croatia and Slovenia). The treaty of Ossimo between Italy and Yugoslavia formally recognized Zone B of the Peace treaty (Istria) as part of Yugoslavia and established the creation of a Zona Franca Industriale di Confine (Zfic) which aimed to relaunch the economy of the city and was a hotly contested issue (Cecovini 1985: 9-11).

[30] The program included: 1. a European parliament for the confederation of the *ethnies* and regions of Europe; 2. Regional autonomy and powers; 3. solving the problems of border regions; 4.. Free use of the languages of minorities and the local ethno-linguistic communities; 5. Ownership of natural resources and power to program and manage the economy; 6. A managable society for the individual fighting against consumerism and moral and physical pollution; 7. Belonging to the "gruppo misto" and in close collaboration with the other elected within the automist sector in other countries.

Veneta, Lega Lombarda and Union Piemonteisa claimed nationhood for the ordinary regions of Veneto, Lombardy and Piedmont; the claim of distinctiveness—we are different—provided the logic of political action to the new parties. As an early document of Liga Veneta put it: "We are neither Celts nor Slavs, neither Italians nor Germans, but Venetians, and it is our firm intention to continue to be" (Liga Veneta 1982). Their electoral success was shaped by the strategies and resources upon which they mobilized and by the existing political opportunity structures in the Italian political system during the 1980s.

The European elections of the 1970s provided the stimulus for some activists in Piedmont, Veneto and Lombardy to transform their associations and political groups into party organizations and to compete in Italian elections for recognition of their special status within the Italian state. Liga Veneta was born in 1980 as a formal organization. Gremmo's *Movimento Autonomista Rinascita Piemonteisa* operated on an informal basis until 1984, when the movement became *Union Piemonteisa*. Lega Lombarda was launched in 1980-1981 first as Lega Autonomistica Lombarda, although it was formally constituted in 1984.[31] Liga Veneta, Union Piemonteisa and Lega Lombarda claimed recognition as nations whose territorial boundaries corresponded to the ordinary regions of Piedmont, Lombardy and Veneto.

The claims of distinctiveness were based on ethnic and linguistic traits. In Veneto, the Societa Filologica Veneta, created in 1978 on the example of the historical Societa Filologica Friuliana, aimed to "preserve the cultural legacy of Venetians and their language." As the Declaration about the Unity of the Venetian Language elaborated by the Association put it:

> The *Societa Filologica Veneta* aims to assert the vitality and unity of the pan-Venetian linguistic reality. The latter, developed on solidly united cultural and ethnic bases, has maintained for over 3000 years its own homogeneous and original identity, un undeniable patrimony of Venetians and Europe. (*Societa Filologica Veneta*, Amantia and Vendramini 1994)

Likewise, the parties in Lombardy and Veneto made language the basic distinction for recognizing their nations and the basis for granting cultural and political auton-

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[31] La Lega Autonomista Lombarda was originally created by a small group of people also linked to Gremmo and the local newspaper *Vento del Nord*, in the province of Como. In the newspaper, Renzo Schelfi appears as president of the Lega. On the first attempt to create a Lega Lombarda without the presence of Bossi, see Gremmo 1992.

omy. The parties claimed the protection and recognition of the Lombard, Piedmonts and Venetian languages.[32]

Cultural distinctiveness was the criterion for recognizing ethnic minorities, and nationhood oppressed by the Italian state was the normative basis invoked by the parties in order to claim collective rights. Both international norms and Italian Constitutional provisions were brought to the fore by the new parties. Union Piemonteisa, Liga Veneta and Lega Lombarda claimed that this situation had to be reversed by the recognition of their right to self-government under an international system tht protected ethnic and national minorities. As Achille Tramarin put:

> Today, every democrat, every anti-racist, every anti-colonialist must call upon a great principle of universal progress, that of giving consenting indigenous people an absolute priority in the job market, in housing, in credit, *edilizie*, education, in health services, in the direction of politics and economics. The Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Treaty sanctioned the principle upon which every people must be *padrone* in its own land. (Tramarin, *Un Censimento per Essere Italiani. La libertá dell'individuo deve essere preceduta dalla libertá del popolo. VdN* p 11, 1981)

They also demanded the introduction of "special" statutes for the ordinary regions granting specific recognition of ethnic status, and for the acquisition of similar rights of fiscal and cultural autonomy as had been granted to the German-speaking population of the Trentino-Alto Adige (see Table 2).

The new regional parties were very weak organizations and lacked the resources to mobilize and compete in elections. Throughout the 1980s, they relied mostly on volunteer work by members in order to conduct their activities. Party journals and the production of pamphlets and graffiti across the regions represented the main component of party activities and financial commitment during the 1980s. In addition, parties pooled resources to finance some of their activities and electoral campaigns, and provided loans to each other. They also collaborated in the publication of party journals. The similarities in their politics made them allies in their struggle for institutional recognition during the 1980s.

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[32]Though the variety of dialects in Italy is widely recognized in scholarly writing, linguistic experts negate the language status of most of these dialects. The language status of Lombard, given the variety of dialects in the region, made the views on the existence of a Lombard language an invention of the leader of Lega Lombarda, Umberto Bossi, and the language status of Piedmontese and Venetian was bitterly discussed in the AIDLCM (Gremmo 1992). The distinction between regional language and dialect is arbitrary and is usually based on criteria of differentiation—how different a language is from the "official" language, as well as the extent to which the language is a "literary" language and is standardized.

The first statute of Liga Veneta already included the main battlegrounds of the regional movements during the 1980s, and it was basically copied by the other parties. As the comparison of party programs in Table 2 shows, the programs of the new parties incorporated the same set of cultural, political and economic demands on the Italian state. They demanded protection of the territory and economic measures to promote regional economic growth. The programs asked for a return of the administration of social, health and education services and justice to the regions, to be put in the hands of their people.

The programs also asked for the transformation of Italy into a federal state. "Integral federalism" (as Liga Veneta called it) would provide a new "social, economic and political model." Their political project aimed at the creation of a federalist Europe, a Europe of *ethnies* and peoples rather than states. This political project was shared by all regionalist parties and reflected the influence of the ideas of European federalist movement. Federalism in Europe—ethnic federalism as envisaged by Heraud—provided a set of new ideas for reconfiguring borders in a united Europe (Heraud 1963, 1971). [33]

[33] The Federal Union of European Nationalities endorsed these views and the the European federalist movement had its Italian section (*Partito Federalista Europeo*) in Mantova. The latter will be allies of the autonomist movements during the 1980s.

Table 2: Comparing party programs

	Liga Veneta (1982)	Lega Lombarda (1984)	Union Piemonteisa (1984)
1	the self-government of Veneto, overcoming the Italian party system through the creation of a Venetian autonomous regions with special statute	the self-government of Lombardy overcoming the centralized state with a modern federal state which know how to respect all the people who constitute it	the self-government of Piedmont, overcoming the Italian party system through the institution of an autonomous region with special statute
2	the priority of Venetians in the assignment of jobs, offices, housing, assitance, and tax contributions in Veneto	the reassertion of our culture, history and the Lombard language, of our social and moral values. Against any attack on the Lombard national identity.	the priority of Piedmonts in the assignment of any job, office, housing, assitance or financial contribution in Piedmont
3	the reassertion of our culture and history, of the Venetian language, of our Venetian moral and social values	the priority of Lombards in the assignment of jobs, housing, assitance and financial contributions.	the reassertion of our culture and history, of our Piedmont language, of our moral and social values as Piedmonts
4	the product of our work and taxes should be controlled and managed by Venetians through the organization of a Venetian fiscal system similar to the one in Trentino-Sud Tirolo	the product of our work and taxes should be controlled and managed by Lombards, through the organization of a financial system similar to the one in in Trentino-Sud Tirolo	the administration, social and health services and school should turn back to Piedmont to be managed by true Piedmonts
5	the administration, social and health services and school in Veneto should turn turn back to Veneto and be managed by ture Venetians	the defense of a balance industrial development, artisanship and agriculture, patrimony of work and civility of the Lombard people	the defense of all cultural and social activities in Piedmont, the product of the work and taxes of Piedmonts should be controlled by Piedmonts, through the organization of a fiscal system similar to the one in Trentino-Sud Tirolo
6	justice in Veneto should turn back to be inspired by traditional Venetian principles to fight with efficacy and adequate instruments crime, mafia and rackets	the development of a Lombard pension system which guarantees the pensions for our workers, menaced by the pensions of invalidity distribuited in the South.	Programs of development of railway and international communication, roads, highways, tunnels.
7	Against the *opportunistico-mafiosa* mentality of the Rome government; against the degradation of the Veneto and the persistent migrantion of Venetians from their own land	public administration and schools should turn back to be managed by true Lombards	the improvement of depressed areas, solutions to the problems of mountain areas, policies for the promotion of tourism, improvement of artisanship and agriculture, subsidies for our old people
8	Against the negation of our rights as European people and the attacks on our own identity	our young should do their military service in Lombardy like they do in Sud Tirolo	Creation of new institutions for vocational and technical training to prepare the young, creation of a decentralized university system in Piedmont. Finacing of scientific research and cultural activities

9	Against the devastation and selling off of our own territory (given and preserved by our ancestors), patrimony we must integrally pass on to future generations	justice in Lombardy should fight with efficacy and adequate instruments against crime, mafie, rackets	Justice in Piedmont should turn back to be inspired by traditional Piedmont values and fight with efficacy and adequate instruments crime, mafie and rackets
10	the reinsertion of Venetian migrants who come back to Veneto and the promotion of relationship between the Venetian motherland and the small Venetian *patrie* disseminated in the world.	Against the devastation and selling off of our territory, given and preserved by our ancestors, patrimony that we must pass on integrally to future generations	Against the *opportunistica-maffiosa* mentality of the Roman government, against the consequent degradation of Piedmont
11	For the construction of European unity founded upon federalism and the respect and direct solidarity among all people of the Continent	Against the opportunistic mentality of Roman parties and the subsequent degradation of Lombardy	Against the devastation and selling off of our territory (given and preserved by our ancestors, patrimony we must pass on integrally to future generations
12		For the construction of a united Europe founded on the principle of autonomy, federalism, and the respect and the direct solidarity of all the peoples	Against the negation of our rights as a European people and attacks on our identity
13		Against attacks against our identity	For the construction of a united Europe founded upon federalism and the respect and direct solidarity among all the people in the Continent

The new parties in the ordinary regions of the North competed in elections during the 1980s incorporating not only a claim of recognition and distinctiveness for their nations, but also a denunciation of traditional Italian parties, the corrupt political class, and the bureaucratic and inefficient Italian state. The new regional parties slowly made electoral gains in local, national and European elections during the 1980s. The first party to gain parliamentary representation—one senator and one deputy—was Liga Veneta in 1983. By the next general elections in 1987, the Venetian party lost its representation and Lega Lombarda entered the Italian parliament for the first time, electing also one senator and one deputy. The party in Piedmont elected representatives to local, provincial and regional administrations but never reached the Italian Parliament. By the end of the 1980s Lega Lombarda had become a massive electoral success; in the 1990 regional elections it became the fourth party in the North and the most successful political actor of the postwar period. Table 4 shows the electoral evolution of regional vote in the electoral districts of Veneto, Piedmont and Lombardy during the 1980s.

Table 4. Percentage of vote for the new regional parties (1979-1989)

Electoral Districts	1979	1983	1984	1987	1989
Piedmont 1	0.8	0.4	0.3	6.4	2.0
Piedmont 2	1.3	0.5	0.3	4.1	2.1
Lombardy 1	0.2	0.1	0.2	2.5	5.3
Lombardy2	0.3	0.2	0.4	6.1	11.4
Lombardy3	0.3	0.1	0.2	1.1	7.1
Veneto 1	0.3	4.1	3.5	2.9	1.8
Veneto 2	0.4	4.6	3.3	3.3	1.5

Source: Roberto Biorcio. *La Padania Promessa* (Il Saggiatore, Milano 1997: 47).
Data from 1979, 1984, 1989 European Elections; 1983 and 1983 general elections

The electoral success of Lega Lombarda and the failure of its sister parties in Veneto and Piedmont is generally explained by the differences between Lega Lombarda on the one hand, and Union Piemonteisa and Liga Veneta on the other. For instance, Biorcio and Diani identified different logics of political action behind the new regional parties: the populist nature of Lega Lombarda vis-à-vis the ethnic nature of the parties in Piedmont and Veneto (Melucci and Diani 1992, Biorcio 1991, 1997). According to these authors, Lega Lombarda turned towards a broader anti-party populist platform (anti-tax, anti-party, anti-state rhetoric), whereas the parties in Veneto and Piedmont were trapped by ethnic and cultural claims that could only appeal to a minority of the electorate.[34]

In fact, Bossi's interpretation of events emphasized his strategic vision vis-à-vis the ethnic approach of the leadership of the other parties (Bossi 1992). Though suggestive in light of subsequent events (the mass electoral success of Lega Lombarda at the end of the 1990s and the electoral failure and disappearance of the Venetian and Piedmontese organizations), this explanation emphasizes political differences among these three parties, whereas what is rather striking are the similarities in their programs, strategies and views during the 1980s.

The persistence of ethnic claims and language issues in Veneto and Piedmont vis-à-vis the disregard of ethnic issues by Lega Lombarda is usually brought to

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[34]There is a substantial body of literature on Lega Nord as a populist party. See Renato Mannheimer, ed., *La Lega Lombarda* (Milano: Feltrinelli 1991), Roberto Biorcio, "Neopopulism in Italy and France," *Telos*, No 90 (Winter 1991-1992), Roberto Biorcio, *La Padania Promessa*, 1997. Betz, Hans-George. *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1994), and Herbert Kitschelt with Anthony J. McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe. A comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor MI: The University of Michigan Press).

the fore to explain the differences among the parties. However, the evolution of "ethnicity" and the question of regional languages was similar for all the regional parties. The election posters of the parties from the beginning combined Italian with Piedmontese, Venetian and Lombard. The first local councilors elected in 1985 used dialects in their initial public interventions. Yet the significance of dialect as a symbolic form of assertion was downplayed during the decade as the parties tried to appeal to a broader audience. In all of them—not only Lega Lombarda—the emphasis on cultural and linguistic content decreased during the decade. All the parties abandoned gradually, though never entirely, the centrality of language in their politics during the 1980s.

All the regional parties behaved in an opportunistic way and their electoral strategies were similar. They attempted to broaden their electoral base and gained political visibility during the 1980s in similar ways. Protest against the central government and traditional parties which neglected the interests of the regions in favor of the South was a common characteristic of their programs and pamphlets. They all presented themselves as political alternatives to the corruption and lack of representation of traditional parties. The anti-tax polemic, the attack against the central government, the South as the source of social and political corruption, all shaped the views and programs of Union Piemonteisa and Liga Veneta. One of the first posters of Liga Veneta in 1981 exemplifies the early importance of fiscal and taxation issues for all the regional parties: "Why do Venetians have to pay for the debts of Italians?" (manifesto no 9, 1981).

The electoral prospects of the parties in Veneto and Piedmont were hindered by internal factors that weakened their resources during the decade. While arguably Union Piemonteisa and Liga Veneta initially had more resources than Lega Lombarda, internal in-fighting weakened the emerging party organizations and prevented their consolidation. Both in Veneto and Piedmont, conflicts within Union Piemonteisa and Liga Veneta over the leadership of the parties ended in court disputes.[35] Internal conflicts led to the creation of other regional parties with similar

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[35]In Veneto, the early electoral success of Liga Veneta and the election of two representatives in 1983 was also accompanied by internal struggles among its founders over the control of the party and its leadership. On the basis of the party's statutes, one of the new elected representatives, Tramarin—at the time the party's general secretary—should have resigned from his position. His refusal led to a major political conflict within Liga Veneta that ended with a court decision that granted the name and symbols of the party to the group around Rochetta and Marin. While the party in Piedmont was always in a marginal position vis-à-vis its partners—electing candidates to local and provincial governments but never to the Italian Parliament—similar processes took place. Conflicts during the 1980s over the Leninist leadership of its founder, Gremmo, led to the

programs and objectives, and the presentation of competing lists in elections. These conflicts were covered extensively by the local press and weakened the public image of the parties and their leaders. Confusion over electoral symbols added to their difficulties in gaining parliamentary representation. The presence of competing lists in Veneto and Piedmont effectively prevented the regional parties from gaining representation. Internal divisions within the parties during the 1980s prevented Liga Veneta and Union Piemonteisa from gain visibility just before the collapse of the traditional parties that had dominated Italian politics in the postwar period.

The different electoral trajectories of these regional parties during the 1980s do not explain why the North and Padania are today the relevant categories of belonging and nationhood as opposed to Lombardy. At the end of the 1980s, a coalition of regional parties turned into a single party under the leadership of Bossi: Lega Nord. In order to explain the creation of Lega Nord and the expansion of regional political mobilization to the other regions of the North, the next section looks into the organizational interdependence of these parties. Their electoral alliances and organizational interdependence since their origins in the early 1980s led to the creation of Lega Nord.

Electoral Coalitions, Interdependence and the creation of Lega Nord

Political processes explain why some categories of belonging and nationhood become available in the public sphere and others don't. The political choices made by regional leaders during the 1980s led to the creation of Lega Nord and the incorporation of regional organizations within it, effectively preventing competition at the regional level. As I explained above, movements in the ordinary regions developed from the beginning a close relation of collaboration. Cooperation among the regional parties took place not only because of the commonalities in their political projects but also for strategic reasons. The electoral symbol became the most valuable strategic resource in the hands of the new regional parties during the 1980s. According to the Italian legislation on elections, new parties had to collect a certain amount of signatures in order to be allowed to present their lists and compete in elections. Parliamentary representation, however, waived this requirement. During the decade, electoral symbols were often exchanged and borrowed in order to compete in elections. In the European elections of 1979, 1984 and 1989, the electoral coalitions were supported by the symbols of the parties with parliamentary represen-

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creation of a new regional party, Piedmont Autonomista. In 1987 the autonomist lists were divided between Union Piemonteisa and the new Piemont Autonomista of Farassino, a well-known singer.

tation at that time: Union Valdotaine (1989), Liga Veneta (1984) and Lega Lombarda (1989). This practice was also used for local and general Italian elections. Lega Lombarda and Union Piemonteisa borrowed the symbol of Lista per Trieste in the general elections of 1983. Lega Lombarda and Union Piemonteisa also borrowed the electoral symbol of Liga Veneta in the local and regional elections of 1985. Thus, whoever had parliamentary representation also had the leverage to negotiate and define both the political goals of the coalition and its constituting members.

They created a federation for the cooperation of autonomist parties and for the presentation of common lists in European elections. In 1981, the parties had a meeting in Nancy to work towards a European federation of Federalists and Autonomists (including Partito Federalista Europeo, Moviment D'Autonomia e Arnassita Piemonteisa, Lega Lombarda, Liga Veneta e Movimento Friuli (*Vento del Nord*, no 2, Gremmo 1981).[36] The regional parties ran together in the European elections of 1984 and 1989. The parties reached an agreement in Verona in 1984 to present a single list to the European Elections of 1984. The electoral coalition, the Union for a Federalist Europe, included Partito Federalista Europeo, Movimento Autonomista Rinascita Piemontese, Lega Autonomista Lombarda, Liga Veneta and Partito Popolare Trentino Tirolese per l'Unita Europea. Lombardia Autonomista describes it as "an alliance of Padanian-Alpinian people against traditional parties" (*Lombardia Autonomista* 17, 1984). The document formalizing the alliance states: "the new alliance aims to become the nucleus for the construction of a great federalist political force as an alternative to traditional parties" (*Lombardia Autonomista* 17 Gennaio 1984).[37]

The second electoral alliance, for the European elections of 1989, was made on April 20, 1989. This time it was defined as an "alliance of autonomist, ethnic and federalist movements for the representation of the regions of Northern Italy" (Lombardia Autonomista 1989). The parties participating in the coalition also

[36] Again in 1982, in a Conference organized by UOPA, there was an agreement for "an activation of a '*Federazione Autonomista Alpino Padana*.'" The agreement was taken by Lega Autonomista Lombarda, Liga Veneta, M.A.R.P. (Movimento Autonomista Rinascita Piemontesa) and U.O.P.A. (Unione Ossolona per l'Autonomia) (*Lombardia Autonomista* 2. 1982).
[37] After the elections, in November 1984, a meeting of the representatives of the parties included in l'Unione coordinated a "common action" for the regional elections of the following year and stressed the importance of and the need for the Union to better structure is political efforts and organization as a movement for the assertion of the Federal Autonomista, Ethnic and European ideals (*Autonomie Valdotaine* 17, 1984). In June 1985, the meeting of the Steering Committee took place in Verona and confirmed the collaboration between the parties. In the fall of 1985, a Conference of Federalists and Autonomists took place in Turin, whose conclusions stressed again the need for a federalist political force to create a Europe of Regions and Peoples (*L'Unione Piemonteisa* 16, 1985).

changed. The movements participating in the alliance were Lega Lombarda, Liga Veneta, Piemont Autonomista, and three new parties—Union Ligure, Alleanza Toscana, Lega Emilia-Romagna.

Table 3: Electoral Alliances and European Elections

1979 Union Valdotaine's Federation	1984 Unione per l'Europa Federalista	1989 Alleanza Nord

•Union Valdotaine
•Liga Veneta
•Rinascita Piemontese
•Movimento Autonomista
  Occitano
•Partito popolare Trentino
  Tirolese
•Coumboscuro (Movimento di
  autonomia e civilta provenzale
  alpina)
•Union Slovena
•Movimento Friuli
•Partito Federalista Europeo
	•Partito Federalista Europeo
	•Movimento Autonomista
	  Rinascita Piemontese
	•Lega Autonomista Lombarda
	•Liga Veneta
	•Partito Popolare Trentino
	  Tirolese per l'Unita Europea.
		•Lega Lombarda
		•Liga Veneta
		•Movimento Autonomista
		  Piemontese
		•Union Ligure
		•Alleanza Toscana
		•Lega Emilia-Romagna

The European elections of 1989 represented the first massive electoral success for the autonomist movements. *Alleanza Nord*, originally devised as a confederation of autonomist parties, was also a program for a closer collaboration among the parties. The alliance involved the formalization of political practices that had developed among the movements during the 1980s: a political project to consolidate one movement, one party and one list in each single region—trying to integrate local movements into regional ones and eliminate competition over the territory—and a policy of non-intervention in party internal issues—violated by all of them during the decade. Despite the policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of their allies, the parties actively intervened in the solution of disputes in other regions.

The division of autonomist lists in Veneto and Piedmont allowed Bossi to take advantage of those divisions to improve his party's position within the coalition. Conflicts between competing lists in Piedmont and Veneto provided Bossi with room to negotiate among the factions, and further strengthened his political leverage. In the late 1980s, he would practice this "weakening-the allies" policy (Gremmo 1992). On the other hand, organizational interdependence gave him the possibility of choosing partners for electoral alliances. In turn, the regional parties had incentives to stay within a broader coalition to improve their chances of get-

ting parlimentary representation. Thus, from 1984 to 1989, the partners of the alliance changed. Of the original regional parties participating in the electoral alliance of 1984, only Lega Lombarda and Liga Veneta remained within the electoral pact.

Electoral success in the European elections of 1989 consolidated the electoral alliance of autonomist parties. The agreement for the European elections of 1989 provided the basis for creating a single party. The creation of Lega Nord was sanctioned in 1989, although Lega Nord was fully launched as a single party only at its first congress in 1991.[38] The process of party formation reflected power relations within the autonomist sector. Lega Nord was the product of negotiations among the parties, but fundamentally reflected the hegemony of Lega Lombarda with respect to the other regional parties. In the transition from autonomist movements to Lega Nord, they had initially sought coordination rather than centralization. Lega Nord would have served as an umbrella organization for running national and European elections, while the regional divisions would have control over regional and local elections. However, what was originally devised as a confederation of movements evolved into single centralized party. Later, Bossi managed to remove the regional founders, thus achieving control over the organization not only in Lombardy but also in the other regions. The transition from independent regional parties into a single Lega Nord involved the transformation of autonomous organizations in each of the regions into party administrative divisions—national secretaries within a single centralized party. Lega Nord acquired legal ownership of the original symbols of all the other parties and became a coalition of unity in diversity. [39]

In the first Federal Assembly of Lega Nord, Bossi defined the new political battle for the North:

> the isolation of every single region is not feasible because we face a powerful opponent, the national state (lo stato nazionale). European culture, brought forward by Lega, has entered into collision with the centralist and anti-democratic culture of a great part of the country. . . In order to make our culture the winner, we absolutely must avoid

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[38]The transformation of the territorial boundaries of the new political project is also covered by the changes in the names of the party journal. Still in 1992 the name was *Lombardia Autonomista. Constituente della Federazione Politica Lega Nord.* In October 1992 the journal was released as *Republica del Nord. Italia Federale: Nord-Centro-Sud. Organo Ufficiale della Lega Nord* but by the end of the year, the journal's name got established as *Lega Nord. Italia Federale: Nord-Centro-Sud. Organo Ufficiale della Lega Nord.* Since September 1996, the journal has been called *Lega Nord. Padania Indipendente. Organo Ufficiale della Lega Nord.*

[39]Legal ownership includes also the symbol of Liga Veneta—which becomes Lega Nord-Liga Veneta—the only one, other than Lega Lombarda, with the right to use the old symbol in local and regional elections.

falling into the traps of micronationalism, into the battle for the local language. These are the things which will come about by themselves in a second stage, they are the natural consequence of the changed balance of political power. (*Lega Nord*, 28 Maggio 1993)

The current leadership of Lega Nord—party organizers and representatives—considered the explanation for creation of the single party as self-evident. They see the creation of Lega Nord as the possibility of combining against common ene-mies—the state and the traditional Italian parties—without eliminating the roots of their national distinctiveness. Yet this set of ideas about the commonalities of the North and Europe is also reinforced by strategic considerations on past, present and future opportunities in the political arena. Alternative political projects, the splin-ters of the original regional parties, failed in their attempts to gain visibility. Dur-ing the last decade, many leaders in Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont left the orga-nization. They explained in personal interviews that exit from Lega Nord does not pay in political terms. The organizational expansion of Lega Nord had a crowding-out effect for other regional parties during the 1990s.[40] As the leaders of the parties in Veneto and Piedmont (both originals and splinters) claim, the electoral success of Lega Nord and the introduction of a new electoral system, primarily majoritarian, made it extremely difficult to organize alternatives to Lega Nord's hegemony.

Throughout the 1980s the lack of governmental alternatives to Christian Democratic governments and public dissatisfaction with traditional parties led to renewed criticisms against Italian *partitocrazia*. Though electoral volatility in the Northern regions increasingly grew, offering new space for electoral competition, during the 1980s there was fundamental continuity in the main lines of conflict in the Italian party system (Mannheimer 1991). However, by the turn of the decade, the shocks provided by the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and increas-ing corruption scandals eroded the basis of the main political division in the Italian party system, that of Christian Democrats and Communists.[41] In the 1990s, the stakes of electoral competition were much higher, making Lega Nord not only the most successful new political actor in the North, but also eliminating alternative

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[40]Splinters exist but they have been failures.

[41]On the transformation of the Italian party system see: Maurizio Cotta and Pierangelo, Isernia. *Il Gigante dai Piedi di Argilla.* (Societa Editrice il Mulino Bologna, 1996); the special issue of *West European Politics*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Frank Cass, London 1997), Leonardo Morlino, "Crisis of Parties and Change of Party System in Italy," *Party politics* 2\1:5-30 (Sage 1996); on the new electoral sys-tem see, Richard Katz, "Electoral reform and the Transformation of party politics in Italy" *Party Politics* 2\1:31-53 (Sage 1996); and Stefano Bartolini e Roberto d'Alimonte, eds., *Maggioritario Ma Non Troppo* (Bologna: Il Mulino 1995).

claims of territorial distinctiveness from the electoral arena. The creation of Lega Nord did not transform the logics of political action of the party—a territorial identity as the basis for claiming institutional recognition—but changed the category of belonging and nationhood, its geographical boundaries and the markers of cultural distinctiveness. Whether in the form of federalism within the Italian state or secession and independence for Padania within a united Europe, Lega Nord has always claimed that the North is different and must be institutionally recognized as such.

Defining and Essentializing the Nation: the New Padania: Northerns and Europeans

Categories of nationhood are constructed by essentializing traits in peoples bounded by territories and deconstructing pre-existing categories of belonging. The claim of distinctiveness by Lega Nord is based on commonalties as Northerners and Europeans. Categories of belonging define boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the collectivity (Balibar 1986). The similarity of Northern peoples is defined vis-à-vis the other: the South and immigrants from Northern Africa, Albania and Eastern Europe. Otherness is constructed on the differences between two cultures, one Mediterranean-African, the other European. New territorial boundaries and new views on similarity and diversity include all the "nations" of the North and exclude the Southerners and new migrants as Mediterranean. European belonging shaped the construction of a new category of nationhood, shaped by its unity in diversity. The new party represented the North no longer as a collection of Italian peripheries and internal colonies, but as the core of Europe and a European macroregion.

The new parties in Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont grounded their identity claims on their ethnic minority status: within Italy as internal colonies, within Europe as European ethnic minorities. This claim of distinctiveness involves a reinterpretation of historical processes by essentializing the nation and its origins in a distant past and by constructing the state as a modern artifact imposed on those nations. The Lombard, Piedmont and Venetian nations are presented as a-historical collectivities. As the presentation of the program of Liga Veneta put it,

> Venetians constitute from many thousands of years a nation, that is, a people wholly defined on the basis of their own constant cultural, ethnic, social, moral, economic, linguistic (and many other) characteristics. Presentation and Program of Liga Veneta (1982)

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The existence of these nations and their ethnic distinctiveness is viewed as natural, self-evident.[42] In the views of the political activists who created the parties in Piedmont, Veneto and Lombardy, past historical developments—the Piedmont kingdom, the Venetian Republic and coalition of Lombard cities gathered by Alberto di Giussano against the emperor Federico il Barbarossa in 1167—were the historical precedents for their present distinctiveness and nationhood.

The parties contrasted their views on the essential, self-evident nature of their nations with the modernity and artificiality of the Italian state. Thus, the Italian state is depicted as a recent artificial construction imposed on the Lombard, Piedmont and Venetian nations. For instance, throughout the 1980s the parties contested the legitimacy of the plebiscite—a mockery in their view—that sanctioned the process of Italian unification and the heroes of Italian national unification. According to one of the members of Liga Veneta "in fact it is still to be demonstrated that the Venetian people . . . were very anxious to be liberated by Savoy" (Beggiatto 1988). Or as Brodero and Gremmo put it, "only a minority, sexually (men), socially (the wealthy), and culturally (italofoni-italografi) voted in the plebiscite" (Brodero and Gremmo 1978: 21). The Italian state is considered an active invader that endangers the survival of their own cultures and exploits their resources and economies: the Italian state imposed a process of cultural assimilation and uniformity within its territorial boundaries.[43] Regional leaders consider that a history of lost independence and oppression under the Italian states makes the 'ordinary' regions internal colonies within the Italian state—"Il nostro povero Piedmont, the most colonized of the colonies" Rinascita Piemontese, gennaio 1978. Anno II, n1). The colonialism and uniformity imposed by the Italian state implies, in this view, an assimilation of the North with the Italian South.[44]

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[42] As a party document in Veneto put it: "The Veneto is, among the European nations, one of the most homogeneous and *easiest to identify and define*, one among the oldest, a nation that, with the passage of systems and states has known how to keep over milleni more or less the same ethnic boundaries...., that {nation}which has kept longer than any other in Europe continuity in its own self-government, even succeding in avoiding Roman conquest" (*Liga Veneta* 1982). Or as Brodero and Gremmo claimed, "three and a half million Piedmontes live today, with *precise ethnic characteristics*, in a smaller area than the current region ("Piedmont, a forbidden nation," Brodero and Gremmo 1978).

[43] According to Brodero and Gremmo, "the hurry to make, in any case Italy, led to fight everything that seemed too far away from the 'ideal' of levelling-off and uniformity from the Alps to Sicily.... From which we can explain the anti-Piedmontese policy, imperial-colonialist, megalomanic and war-monger of the so-called 'Risorgimento.'"

[44] "We are for la "lombardita" in Lombardy, as much as for the "napoletanita" in Campania and the "sicilianita" in Palermo, and at the same time, we are against the sort of cultural colonialism that surge from decades, and that tends to, from the part of the current center of powers and in particular on the part of the media, to make our country an entirely Southern region.

Essentialism was also shaped by the common understanding that these nations were united as Northern and European. As Northerners, they were marked by a common culture and historical legacy. The pre-existing Piedmont, Venetian and Lombard nations were considered part of a supranational Northern reality: they were different among themselves, but equal within the North of Italy. According to Gremmo:

> supra-national cultural realities undoubtedly exist in the world: for instance, Egyptians are a nation despite belonging to the greater Arab world. The same applies to the Alpine Arc, where peoples, minorities, different nationalities with precise characteristics (which are undeniable and qualifying) recognize themselves as united . . . by a common civility which has its own roots in a millenarian origin, very different from that of the (Mediterranean) peoples of the peninsula. *Padania* is the *logical* continuation of this discourse. . . . (*VdN* 1981)

Views on Europe have played a crucial role in the definition of the emerging new territorial identities in Northern Italy. The Italian North as European is contrasted with Mediterranean culture. As the editorial of Vento del Nord put it:

> We state, not out of any foolish claim of supremacy, that European civility is the best which has appeared in the history of the world. . . . it has been the matrix of the best geniuses of humanity . . . in order to feel the "pride" of being a European citizen, equal to other equals in the world, inferior to nobody. (*VdN*, p 1, November 1981)

The parties claim the recognition and protection of ethnic languages and cultures as European: "we want everywhere the defense of local culture sedimented over centuries: languages, dialects, uses, customs, folklore and traditions as European patrimony to save no matter the cost" (*Vento del Nord* 1981).

The creation of Lega Nord has reinforced these two elements in the definition of criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the new category of belonging. As a party leader explained to me: "there are two poles of attraction: Rome and Mittle-Europa. We are not the Mediterranean. The North is European." The basic categorical claim is the existence in a North of a homogeneous people: "we are a people with the same socioeconomic fabric." The sameness of Northerners is presented as natural and self-evident. Cultural essentialism is at work, although the markers of culture distinctiveness have shifted from ethnic and linguistic traits to civic and economic ones. Languages, cultures and *ethnies* are part of the content of identity— a legacy of the origins of the party—and they are invoked to legitimize differences. However, the party leadership rejects ethnicity as the single criterion for distinc-

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tiveness. In the early 1990s, Bossi rejected the exclusivity of ethnic identities of Northerners for defining the peoples of the North. "Not for us. Not in the developed West. The cement can't be only ethnic. It must be also economic" (*Lega Nord*, Febbraio 3, 1993). As a member who was directly involved in the creation of Lega Nord with Bossi put it:

> We moved from an ethnic-cultural discourse to a socioeconomic one. Padania is a people and has a similar socioeconomic fabric. Though we point to a socioeconomic logic . . . we do have the cultural element.

The internal similarity of the North is essentialized and reified as a culture of the North. In the view of the party leadership economic differences between North and South are a manifestation of cultural distinctiveness. In the view of the party leaders, the productivity and wealth of the North are a manifestation of pre-existing cultural traits: a culture of hard work, entrepreneurship and autonomy. Current economic processes and regional economic disparities simply accentuate and manifest their resiliance.[45] Lega Nord is shaping a view of the North caracterized by its civic culture. "Civics" becomes a new marker of belonging to the nation.[46]

> Padania is the North of Italy that has a civic tradition in the comunes. Our project is based on our territory and civic traditions. Our inheritance is the communes, with their elected powers. This is our political *gene*, the sense of autonomy and freedom. This sense remains in our cities and in our spirit.[47]

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[45]As an article in *Quaderni Padani* put it: "in Padania the level of internationalization of the economy is more profound than in the South and progresses rapidly. This process is in Padania, not only the result of a renewed dynamism in the new European and world economic climate, but also of conditions linked to identity, geographical position, the economic and social fabric.... all that strengthens the belonging (*a pieno titolo*) to the *fascia forte* of a Europe constituted by the regions located on the Renan axis projected towards the North in Southern England and in the South, towards Lyon, Grenoble and Padania itself."

[46]"Economical and social factors, especially in relation to European integration and the processes of internationalization of the economy, play today a determinant role in the process of taking national conciousness by the Padanian-Alpinian people to the point of becoming qualifying...a hundred and thirty years of centralized hood and nationalist rhetoric did not yet serve to construct an identity and a unity for which there were no basis:at most they were able to hide part of the cultural diversity under a veil of conformistic levelling. Today the veil is being torn precisely by socioeconomic differences" (Michele Corti, "Padania'Italia, Quale 'Questione Nazionale?'" *Quaderni Padani*, Anno 1, n.2, Autunno 1995. p.15)

[47]Some Lega members mentioned Putnam's work, *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, as proof of the "cultural" differences and division between North and South. On the interpenetration of nationalist discourse with social-scientific discourse see Handler, *The Politics of Culture*.

Similarity within the North also encompasses diversity. Lega politicians from Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont assert the differences within the North but downplay their political relevance. Lega Nord is, from this point of view, a plural reality composed of the differences among the regions, which are recognized and institutionalized in the party organization. A representative of Lega summarized the elements for understanding unity and diversity within the categories advanced by Lega Nord: "the North is homogeneous and dishomogeneous from the rest of Italy. There are differences between Piedmont, Lombardy and Veneto but they are small. The differences between us and the rest of the country are, however, fundamental differences."

Lega politicians consider the South to be a different cultural unit. As one ex-parliamentarian commenting on the differences between North and South put it: "for us, those who aren't able to succeed are those who don't want to." There is a better culture in the North and the proof is that people come here without being forced to do so. . . . Imagine if economic activities would collapse in the North . . . . only to maintain a bunch of parasites, to treat as *signori* those who don't do anything for a living, who don't produce anything. . . . Here in the North mentality and will are the same. The other culture, marked as Mediterreanean also defines new migrants from a variety of countries in Northern Africa—and recently Albania—who "endanger" the social fabric of the North. As one of the most outspoken party leaders against immigration put it: we are from the very beginning against immigration because 'it is a dangerous phenomenon which risks disintegrating the social fabric. We are unprepared to deal with immigration and the latter has a violent impact upon us. We need to regulate these flows, and introduce more severe norms and solve this problem by the expulsion of undocumented immigrants."

Essentializing the North is also about deconstructing the Italian nation-state. As one regional representative put it, "there are two Italys, one is African and the other European." The Italian state is, as it was for the first nationalist parties in Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont, a historically fabricated outcome against the cultural reality of the Italian peninsula. As one regional councilor put it: "Italy has been constructed upon a mistake. For the last thousand years there has been a Celtic-Germanic culture and a Greek-Latin one."

The party leadership has made the categories of belonging malleable and in process. Today, asserting a distinctive territorial identity for the North by party leaders, organizers and supporters encompasses a variety of views on the content of cultural distinctiveness, collective belonging and the relevant differences that

make the North a people. Some claim the cultural basis of their identity, while others stress the fundamental socioeconomic nature of their homogeneity. As one of my interviewees described this malleability: "We still need to define where Padania reaches but different socioeconomic processes and different identities do exist in the North." The territorial boundaries of Padania today include a variety of special and ordinary regions of the North of Italy. The first statute of the party did not specify the territorial boundaries of the North, subsequent ones limited Padania.[48]

As I have shown above, what matters to the party leadership is not political decentralization but institutional recognition of the North as a distinctive political unit, the granting of collective rights on the basis of a new category of nationhood, Padania. Congruence between nations and political units is today in Europe at the core of political debates about citizenship and inclusion and exclusion in the European union. The latter is a multinational reality but also a political unit in the making. From the complex interplay of different legitimacies (national, supranational and international) and political uncertainties (inclusion and exclusion in Europe), Padania is today a confusing and contradictory category of belonging. Lega Nord, however, remains grounded in the claim of institutional recognition of the distinctiveness of Northern Italy as Padania, a nation, a multinational reality, a macroEuropean region in search of its rights to self-government in a new European Union without nation-states.

Conclusions

In this paper I explain the rise of new claims of nationhood and belonging in Northern Italy with the rise of new parties in the Italian party system during the 1980s. I argue that we can explore identities as categories of belonging as the outcome of political mobilization, rather than its pre-existing condition. I present a historical analysis that stresses the increasing institutionalization of nations as cultural and political units, and the uninteded consequences of institutional recognition for the generation of new claims of nationhood. I explain the importance of "ethnic" definitions to the recognition of minorities in European pluralist democracies with the wave of political mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s that led to the rediscovery of a multiethnic Europe.

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[48]If we take the national secretaries of the party as the regions included in the North, they are the following: Alto-Adige-Sudtirol, Emilia, Friuli, Liguria, Lombardia, Marche, Piemonte, Romagna, Toscana, Trentino, Trieste, Umbria, Valle d'Aosta and Veneto. On the name of North or Padania.

Then, I apply this analytical framework to a discussion of the new wave of political mobilization in Northern Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. I show how political mobilization involves new claims for ethnic minorities that saw in the recognition of German-speaking population of the province of Bolzano by the Italian state and the international system the structure of incentives to claim their ethnic distinctiveness and demand collective rights as well.

I move on to explain why and how Padania became the relevant category of belonging by looking at how the different electoral strategies of the parties in Piedmont, Lombardy and Veneto and their organizational independence led to the creation of Lega Nord. I focus on the sequence of political choices made by regional party leaders during the 1980s and how their cooperation during the 1980s led to the creation of the North as the relevant category of belonging and to the downplaying of alternative "national" identities. This political process, I claim, preceded a critical juncture in Italian politics: the collapse of the postwar Italian party system and the breakdown of the main governmental parties.

Finally, the paper stresses novelties in the formation of categories of belonging and nationhood, and how these categories are essentialized. Lega Nord advances a new territorial identity that has turned "excluded" minorities in Italy seeking European protection into actively "excluding" Europeans rejecting the presence of migrants from Africa and Eastern Europe and the so-called Mediterranean South. The markers of national identity changed significantly with the passage from the regional parties into Lega Nord. Cultural distinctiveness used to be ethnic and linguistic. Today the markers of identity and cultural essentialism are different. The North is essentialized as a "better culture" because of its civic tradition, productivity and wealth. The rise and success of Lega Nord in Northern Italy suggests that rather than looking into the past to study nationhood and belonging, we must turn to the present to study how old and new political actors are actively creating boundaries of social and political inclusion and exclusion. Electoral arenas might become more and more relevant for the definition of the collectivities in and of Europe (ethnic groups, historical nationalities, migrants) and for the mobilization and acquisition of collective rights.

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