

**Discourses in asylum seeking:**

**An application of the Victim Diamond model to the *Diciotti case***

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## Abstract

This research moves from two assumptions. First, refugees' narratives, when they are spoken out, almost always, refer to and are in dialogue "with other society – shaping stories" (Shuman, 2012, p.140) which works as already familiar scripts, available to them to shape their experience. Second, among these *available narratives*, the *refugee trauma discourse* occupies a privileged position. By establishing a linear, causal-reductive relationship between external events and intrapsychic consequences, the trauma discourse gives for granted that all those who passed through painful occurrences will be traumatised, oversimplifying the complexity of asylum and undermining its political meaning. The refugee trauma discourse has, also, serious impact on refugees' health because - by victimising individuals – their agency, resilience and their processes of self-healing are seriously prevented.

Given the above, the aims of this research are threefold. First, showing that when talking about refugees, the actors cannot avoid playing the roles of to the victim, the persecutor, and the saviour, where refugees are positioned either as the victim - the traumatised refugee, or the persecutor – the refugee as a threat. I will suggest that Papadopoulos' (2021) model of the Victim Diamond can account for the almost 'inevitable' enacting of this stereotyped pattern of behaviours. Second, to verify *if* and under *what* conditions alternative narratives might emerge. Third, to suggest that a method integrating Jungian analytical psychology to Foucauldian discursive analysis might help to deal with some of the issues left unresolved by Foucault as the role of individual agency, and the reason why some discourses are more likely to grip some individuals than others. To achieve my aims, I will focus on "il Caso Diciotti" (the Diciotti case) an event occurred in Italy in 2018 involving 177 refugees banned

from disembarking by the Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini, after being rescued by the Italian patrol boat “Diciotti”.

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## Introduction

# Narrative and Refugees

### I. The refugee: contending identities

In *Making stories: Law, Literature, Life* (2002), the psychologist Jerome Bruner recounts the following autobiographical episode, summing up many themes which will be addressed in this work:

I remember my return to New York from a visit to Europe just over a month after the outbreak of World War II, on a ship that had sailed from Bordeaux with a very colourful cargo of American expatriates returning home. I remember a journalist account, perhaps in the “New York Times” column “Talk of the Town” announcing that the ship Shawnee, my ship, had arrived the previous Wednesday in New York with on board the characters of “The Sun Also Rises”, the novel by Hemingway, then even more popular, on high society American expatriates. Since during the ten days of the crossing I had lived among desperate people-families who separated to save themselves, traders who had had to abandon their business, refugees fleeing the Nazis – I could not fail to be struck, even then, by our persistent tendency to see life imitating art. Because I had resorted to fiction in my interpretation of that journey: the crossing of the Shawnee as another translation into reality of the book of Exodus! (Bruner, 2002, p.8).

Who are the people on the Shawnee? The first definition we come across - when reading the quote - is rather vague. They are a colourful group of *expatriates*, returning back to their country of origin. The term 'expatriates' literally identifies people "living in a country that is not their own" (*Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, n.d). Therefore, what we learnt so far – from the first three lines of the quotation – is that these people are Americans who have lived in Europe and are now leaving, supposedly, to escape the war.

The term 'expatriate', however, has since acquired a more specific meaning, referring to the position of the expatriated citizen in the social hierarchy of the host nation. An 'expatriate', often abbreviated as 'expat', is not only a person settled outside their country of origin, but also a migrant destined to occupy a socially desirable position in the new country. This term, indeed, refers to well-off people and "is generally applied to professionals, skilled workers, or artists from affluent countries, often transferred by companies, rather than all immigrants in general" (*Oxford Reference*, 2013).

It is precisely this second meaning definition that the journalist of 'The New York Time', seems to have in mind, when they refer to the characters of *The Sun Also Rises*, the novel by Hemingway that, as Bruner informs us, is especially popular among the high society American expatriates. Set in Paris in the *Roaring Twenties*, the novel tells the vicissitudes of a group of artists, intellectuals, exponents of English and American high society, fishing, drinking, and grappling with amorous adventures and existential crises, generally "revealing in their youth" (Aldridge, 1990) in the city, becoming the symbol of the lust for life and the creative energy which characterised

post-war France. By framing them as characters of *The Sun Also Rises*, the New York Time journalist is clearly introducing a moral evaluation of the people on the Shawnee. They are, in synthesis, a group of young spoiled rich people travelling to escape boredom.

Immediately after, however, Bruner provides his own perspective on the same individuals. Far from being young expats in Europe, looking for thrills, they are rather refugees fleeing Nazis, desperate people who have lost everything and had to separate from their families to save their lives. From his viewpoint, they are similar to the Jews fleeing Egypt to free themselves from slavery, as demonstrated by his association with the book of Exodus.

Framing a group of people fleeing from a war into a bunch of individuals, living off and leading a morally depraved lifestyle is not a prerogative of the *New York Times*, or of an outdated journalism. In 2015, John Jewell pointed out that, in the UK, asylum seekers are “regularly portrayed as opportunistic, disease-ridden money grabbers – casually entering Britain” (The Conversation, 2015). In the narrative provided by the media, they are seduced by the lure of state-provided riches, superior housing and a life of luxury. Once in the country, they claim all the benefit they can, and refuse to work. Similarly, the Italian right-wing media have conveyed the image of the “refugees as parasites” as shown, for instance, through critiques or violent attacks toward the reception of asylum seekers in hotels<sup>1</sup>. Possibly influenced by this representation, currently the 62 % of Italians think that migrants are a burden for the

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<sup>1</sup> The controversy over the opportunity to host asylum seekers and refugees in hotels seems to be a constant theme in the representation of the Italian migratory phenomenon, so much so it is not possible to summarise it here. To get an idea of the topics and tones of the debate:

[https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/photos/dati-ufficiali-del-ministero-dell'interno/10153818114508155/?paipv=0&eav=AfZn18Cd3yRrEu-Z3EIRFMY\\_09SX\\_eQMtDg4\\_27V\\_w-G051bKlIRJq6240TuMgVIZj4&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/photos/dati-ufficiali-del-ministero-dell'interno/10153818114508155/?paipv=0&eav=AfZn18Cd3yRrEu-Z3EIRFMY_09SX_eQMtDg4_27V_w-G051bKlIRJq6240TuMgVIZj4&_rdr)

welfare state (Cattaneo Institute, 2018), a figure slightly higher than the European average which stands at 59 %. The image produced by Bruner's reference to the Exodus, however, is equally widespread in the Western public debate. Images of flows of migrants walking long distances, defying the fatigue and the discomfort of the crossing, have appeared in the media around the world, evoking the exit of the Jews from Egypt (see figure 1.in the appendix).

### **I.I Refugees, migrants, expatriates? Word choice matters**

While seventy-four years separate us from the above-mentioned *New York Times* article, some of the themes we deal with when it comes to refugees have persisted; the tendency to frame the experience of migrants through narrative conventions; the recourse to Biblical imagery, and to images of victimhood and, above all, the role of media in shaping migrants' identities and the importance of the terminology used in conveying a clear and precise moral stance.

During the so called 2015 refugee crisis in Europe, a debate erupted over what people fleeing war should be called. Relying on the legal definition contained in the Geneva Convention<sup>2</sup> to distinguish between migrants and refugees, the United Nation High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) (2016) points out that, the use and understanding of the word 'migrant' as an *umbrella term* in public discourses, covering both

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<sup>2</sup> "We say 'refugees' when we mean people fleeing war or persecution across an international border. And we say 'migrants' when we mean people moving for reasons not included in the legal definition of a refugee. We hope that others will give thought to doing the same. Choices about words do matter".

migrants and refugees<sup>3</sup>, can lead not only to confusion, but can “have serious consequences for the lives and safety of refugees”.

Also, Adam Taylor, in an article titled *Is it time to ditch the word ‘migrant’?* (“The Washington Post”<sup>24</sup> August 2015), focuses on the word *migrant* highlighting that, while it should be a neutral term, referring to anyone living in a country where they were not born<sup>4</sup>, it has recently acquired negative connotations in Europe. In a column published in the *Sun* newspaper, the writer Katie Hopkins – indeed - used the word “cockroaches” to describe migrants, showing the shift of the adjective “migrant” toward a negative meaning. As commented by Daniel Trilling: “in some quarters, the word ‘migrant’ is shifting from meaning ‘a person who migrates,’ to ‘not human.’” (Trilling, in Taylor, 2015). In order to mitigate the dangerous impact that the choice of language can have on the discourse surrounding migrants, he suggests it is best to refer to the official definitions contained in the Institute for Migration’s glossary, and in the 1951 Refugee Convention, concluding that: “a migrant chooses to leave whereas a refugee is forced to leave” (Taylor, 2015).

Similarly, the linguist Charlotte Tylor (2015) points out that, words related to controversial topics undergo a process of semantic degradation, until they become insults. While there are a range of terms available to describe human migration, the choice of a name over another, is indicative of the speaker’s attitude toward those they are describing. By analysing which words occur most often alongside the six most commonly related to migration (boat people, emigrant, expatriate, immigrant, migrant, refugee), Tylor shows that expatriate co-occurs with “American and British”, while ‘immigrant’ with ‘Chinese’, ‘Mexican’ and ‘illegal’, this latter word

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/55df0e556.html>

<sup>4</sup> “any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country.”

co-occurs also with the term 'migrant'. Through a similar analysis, she finds out that emigrant is associated with 'us', while 'immigrant' with the 'other'.

Probably aware of this, Al Jazeera news program decided to replace the word 'migrant' with that of refugee, to describe those crossing the Mediterranean, motivating this choice with the belief that 'migrant' "is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean". It has evolved into a pejorative, "a tool that dehumanises and distances" (Barry Malone, 2015). The use of the word migrant disguises the humanity of people involved in the dangerous journey toward Europe and renders their death a nuisance: "It already feels like we are putting a value on the word. Migrant deaths are not worth as much to the media as the deaths of others – which means that their lives are not". (Barry Malone, 2015). According to Malone, by applying reductive terminology to people, we foster an environment which nurture hate speech and encourage governments to consider those drowning in the Mediterranean 'just economic migrants', instead of refugees. 'Economic migrants' –indeed – are deemed less deserving of help, so that European leaders justified their inaction, by dismissing refugees as economic migrants (Tylor, 2015).

However, not all agree that the Geneva Convention could serve as Archimedean point to classify those crossing the borders. The drawback of the 'legal strategy' is that it might induces people to morally judge who deserves to enter, and who should be rejected, oversimplifying a complex phenomenon in two opposite polarities. Apart from the obvious consideration - that it is questionable that those who left their countries for reasons which fall outside the requirements of the Refugee Convention Geneva were free to choose, as people flee from untenable conditions determined by economic factors, the difference between who is compelled to flee and who choose



to do it, is blurred. Polarisation is a form of oversimplification of perception, which we adopt when we are overwhelmed, in order to reduce our discomfort.

Judith Vonberg (2015), activist of the NGO Migrant's Rights Network offers an alternative approach to Al Jazeera's, suggesting that word migrant should be 'reclaimed' as "a fair and neutral description of people crossing borders". According to Vonberg, rejecting the term migrant in favour of refugee is a mean to foster the empathy we should be feeling toward these people. But doing so, we give room to the illiberal voices according to which migrants are not worthy of compassion. A similar view is shared by Alexander Bett, professor of refugee and forced migration studies at Oxford University. In sharp contrast with UNHCR recommendations, he suggests that there is still value in using the term 'migrant' as it is a useful umbrella term that simply describes people who move across borders for a certain period of time". In an interview given to *Newsweek*, Bett (2015) notes that: "Migrants also have human rights, and they risk being side-lined if the public begins to see refugees as 'worthy' and migrants as 'unworthy.'"

### **I.I.I Who is the refugee? Refugee, migrant, immigrants as floating signifier**

While the identity of those who cross the borders of their countries of origin is unstable and surrounded by uncertainty, the continuous repositioning of the refugee's identity – mostly - although not exclusively - within the two poles of the desperate victims and the vicious parasites remain stable over the years. What does it make possible to frame the same individuals, in such contradictory terms, either as vicious and profiteers or as desperate displaced persons fleeing wars? Bruner would respond

that this happens because there is not a “real world” pre-existing and independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language. Rather, what we call reality is the result of a process of symbolic construction of human mind (Bruner, 1986). Bruner’s work is informed by one of the core postulates of the so-called *narrative turn*, an expression that refers to that wave of renewed interest in the role of narrative within literature and social science which challenged the positivist approach to social world.

While I agree with Bruner, I argue that this conclusion is necessary but not sufficient. I do believe that the social domain is not independent from language rather, it is always a construction mediated by human consciousness. I suggest –however – that the word “refugee” is typified by a specific ontological inconsistency, rendering it a particularly unstable signifier. This urges the challenging of the self-evidencing label “refugee” (Zetter, 1991). While the supposed ‘transparency’ of the word ‘refugee’ is due to it being a recognised legal status, made credible by an international agency in charge of safeguarding the interest of forced migrants, challenging the ‘self-evident’ label of refugee is not solely a theoretical exercise. Firstly, because definitions shape the identities of those who are defined, facilitating the creation of stereotypes. Secondly, because they do it through a top -down, non-participatory process (Zetter, 1991) within which refugees have little room for negotiation. Thirdly, because they also determine the kind of support available to IDPs from international, establishing hierarchies of deserving and undeserving refugees.

While a conceptual investigation of the term “refugee” is dutiful for the reasons explained above, it will reserve many difficulties for the analyst. What, at first glance, seems an easy task - responding to the question ‘who is the refugee’? - Will prove to be harder than expected (Loizos, 2002, Shacknove, 1985). To begin with, refugees

cannot be considered a homogeneous social group since they all differ for origin, nationality, culture, education, social class, gender, age, religion, and all those features that member of different groups, usually, share. Neither, refugee can be considered as a simple universal idea such as a one-legged man, rather it is better defined as the outcome of an administrative or political decision, at times somewhat arbitrary, based on the Refugee Convention of 1951 (Zetter, 1991). Zetter's insight seems to find in the prerequisites set by the Geneva Convention the Archimede's point to respond to our question. According to the predominant conception advanced by Refugee Convention, 'the refugee' is a person who has crossed an international frontier because a well-founded fear of persecution.

However, as everyone who happened to work or live with refugees knows, anyone legal definitions do not resolve all the conceptual problems, when they do not pose new ones. First, people who are still waiting for the determination of their asylum claim are called "asylum seekers" whereas, when they are granted asylum, they all enjoy the rights of the citizens of the host country, so the very term "refugee" has not ontological status (Papadopoulos 2001). Secondly, the condition of forced migrants can vary greatly: some are out of their state of origin and are waiting to be relocated in a new country by an international agency; others are displaced within the state of which they are nationals; still others, under the Dublin Convention, are waiting to be transferred in a third nation that has been declared in charge to decide about their application. It follows that the term is far from being able to represent the concrete experiences of those who are displaced. While the notions of "well-founded fear", the "reason of the fled" and the prerequisite of being *outside* the country of the claimant's nationality define separate subsets of forced migrants, the empirical and conceptual similarities between refugees, involuntary displaced and forced resettlers

are more numerous than the differences. This point is developed further by Turton (2003) who suggests that forced migration scholars over-rely on policy related categories which are ill-suited to further academic research. Referring to the works of Colson (1991) and Cernea (1990; 1996; 2000), he highlights the commonalities of experience among the uprooted who, while having different legal status, all share the same psychological stress caused by being forcibly displaced and by the loss of their homes, experiences which cause loss of trust in society and feeling of anger and resentment against the administrative authorities or the staff of humanitarian organisations who still control their life. Similar feelings have been discussed by Papadopoulos (2008) about IDPs hosted in African camps, who, in condition of great deprivation and dependency develop resentment toward the staff of the centres perceived as omnipotent but detached.

Similarities will not end if we look at the issue from a socio-economic perspective. All those who are forced to move - regardless their legal status – deal with similar problems as the loss of lands and of “social capital”. Connections between refugees and forced resettlers can be traced at the level of their relation with the state as a political entity. Both the groups of forced migrants expose underlying contradictions in the ideology of the nation- state as a principle of political organisation. Refugees, being unable or unwilling to obtain the protection of their own government, make visible that there is a contradiction between “citizenship, as the universal source of all individual rights, and nationhood as in identity ascribed at birth and entailing a sentimental attachment to a specific community and territory” (Turton, 2003, p 10). However, the contradiction between the nation-state as, on the one hand, the ultimate source of the political power and, on the other, a community of equal citizens is exposed also by the forced re-settlers since it is undeniable, indeed, that the

development programs that are the cause of their uprooting, favour some rather than others weakening the principle of equality.

The elusiveness of the term refugee highlighted above reminds the concept of ‘floating signifier’, firstly introduced by Levi-Strauss (1987) and developed further in Cultural theory (Stuart Hall, 1997) and in Discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe). I suggest here to use the concept in a loose way to highlight how the term ‘refugee’ lacks both agreed upon meaning and a clear and unique referent. In fact, by identifying people in different situations, while failing to pinpoint persons living similar experiences, the term ‘refugee’ resists the constitution of a unique meaning (Kornak, 2015). The “floating” feature of the signifier “refugee” is evident by the intense ‘fight’ around the terminology positioning people crossing borders, and by the way in which the labels “refugee”, “asylum seekers”, “migrants”, “immigrants” are used, according to their interests, by media, policy makers and the way they are used by activist and academics - willing to contrast “the negative semantic slide” (Jeffer, 2008, p.219) which is transforming the word asylum seekers in a synonymous with illegal immigrant.. These dynamics involving different definitions can be read as power dynamics. Power acts on floating signifiers by establishing hierarchies among social groups. The use of the concept of race as a “sliding signifier” (p.5), is emblematic. As Hall pointed out (1997), while classifying is a fundamental cultural impulse because allows the generation of meanings<sup>5</sup>, classifications are invested by power which organise meanings in structures hierarchically ordered, justifying why some groups enjoy more advantages of others. In order for categorisations to become systems of power, they need to be essentialised. In the case of race, it was by rooting it in biology. In the case of refugees, I suggest it is performed by essentialising the label of the victim, facilitating the creation of a victim identity, hypostatize in a fixed identity, what should be a transitory

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<sup>5</sup> “until you classify things, you cannot generate any meaning” (p.2

condition, in which an individual finds themselves for a specific time, due to causes independent of their will. (Papadopoulos 2021).

#### **IV Research questions and outline of the following chapters**

From the hypothesis that the label refugee functions as a floating signifier which is, almost temporary, fixed in the stereotype of the traumatised refugee, serious consequences on people's socio-legal conditions and health are derived.

As I will argue in this work, being able to be perceived as victims by the asylum officials is, now, a prerequisite for getting protection, and refugees tend to conform to their own idea of what officials and helpers expect of them. Narratives of victimhood are commonly performed beyond the refugee status determination process (RSDP), even in theatre, where people represent victimhood, because they reproduce in the theatre what they experienced within the framework of bureaucratic performance (Jeffer 2008). If Shuman is right saying that when refugees take the floor, they are implicitly called to position themselves with respect to public discourse – with “these other society shaping stories” (Shuman, 2012, p.140) - the availability of victimhood as a *familiar script* (Shuman 2011) might be a problem. It renders the risk high for refugees to fully identify in the traumatic history and develop a *victim identity*, a condition where victimhood dominates person's entire being (Papadopoulos, 2020). Developing a victim identity has serious health consequences because it might hinder people's healing processes, and resilience.

What said above makes responding to the following questions urgent: what are the available narratives permeating the public sphere? Why victimhood is so pervasive? *If and under what circumstances* might alternative narratives emerge?

This work is organised as follow. In the *first chapter*, I will offer an overview of the development of the concepts of narrative and discourse, positioning my research within the post-structuralist framework, and defining how these terms should be understood in my work. I will also offer a review of the literature on refugees in the realms of public opinion and media. I will focus on the works of three scholars in particular: T.A van Dijk (1993; 200); Claudia Strauss (2012), Leudar et al. (2008) and Shuman (2011). I will argue that Leudar and of Shuman 's interactional methodologies have the merit to show that the construction of refugees' identity unfolds through different kind of texts and realms, but they both fail in explaining the ubiquity of the trope of the 'refugee victim' across time and space and the reason why people do not resist stereotyping.

In the *second chapter*, I will analyse the wider societal discourses on asylum by focusing on the medical and legal spheres, as well as on that of media. I will argue that these discourses constitute the background from out of which refugees' narratives emerge and victim identity is co-constructed. Further, I will look at Renos Papadopoulos (2021) 's *Victim Diamond*, suggesting it might offer an effective framework to understand how stereotypes are produced, maintained and disseminated in the RSDP.

The *third chapter* will be dedicated to the concept of trauma. Following a preliminary investigation on the very concept of trauma, I will refer to the work of Foucault to argue that the most appropriate method to grasp the genesis of the concept is through a *genealogic* approach. I will consider three historical moments which I regard as particularly relevant to understand the socio-political factors affecting the construction of trauma. Then, I will suggest that, if we approach trauma as a discourse rather than a diagnostic category- we still need to reintroduce the role of the *affect*

which played a part in the scientific models developed to explain traumas. In fact, these models have been elaborated within highly emotional social and political circumstances. Therefore, they can present a kind of one-sidedness, focusing only on a single aspect of trauma (individual vs. collective, biological, or psychological vs. Cultural). At the end of the chapter, I will suggest that Jungian informed theories provide a sufficiently broad framework to contain the multidimensional aspects of trauma.

In the *fourth chapter* the methodology used to analyse discourses will be outlined. The approach which will be discussed combines Foucauldian discursive analysis and Jungian analytical psychology, and relies on the ideas of cultural complex and archetype. Further concepts informing my methodology are those of *media hybrid system* (Chadwick, 2017) and *dialogical network* (Leudar et al. 2018). The former refer to the mutual interactions between older and newer media – which need to be analysed jointly - typical of the new media system. The latter to the idea that different kind of texts such as newspaper articles, TV broadcasts and everyday conversations, which are traditionally studied separately, can be analysed together as the same unit of analysis where each piece of data should be considered as collaborative “turns” in a developing dialogical network.

In the *fifth chapter* I will carry out the analysis of the texts related to the Diciotti case. The material analysed will include Facebook posts, online newspaper articles, YouTube videos, TV and radio broadcastings. After identifying the main discourses permeating the dialogical network activated by the Diciotti case, I will argue that they are supported by archetypal themes and that the dialogical network corresponds to the activation of a *network of archetypal images* (Papadopoulos, 2011).



In the *sixth chapter* I will discuss all the findings, identify the limits of the work and suggest new research perspectives.

## **Chapter**

### **I**

# Narrative and discourse

## 1.1 Narrative and discourse in social life

“Narrative” and “discourse” are highly debated concepts. They have been adopted and used by researchers from different academic fields who have interpreted and shaped them in accordance with the assumptions and objectives of their respective disciplines. In this section I will attempt to clarify how these two concepts should be understood in the context of this research. The key idea underpinning my work is that of ‘Discourse’. My aim is to analyse discourses on refugees, in particular those centred on victimisation. This objective is supported by two interrelated assumptions: one being that these discourses might impact negatively on refugees’ identities, the other that these identities should be understood as narratively constructed by the refugees themselves, when presenting their own stories. Therefore, clarifying the meaning I attribute to the term narrative is pivotal, to understand the premises grounding this research. I will begin by addressing some unresolved issues, concerning both, the concept of narrative and that of discourse. When discussing narrative and discourse analysis, there is a prevailing tendency to stress more the differences than the similarities. However, while they constitute two different disciplinary fields, discourse and narrative analysis are, at the same time, “partly overlapping” (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015, p.3). They share, in fact, the common

interest in the interactional and mutual shaping of relationship between the individual and society, and also a number of unresolved issues, which will be focus of next paragraph.

### **1.1.1 Narrative and discourses: open issues and shared points**

While scholars from different academic fields have acknowledged the centrality of narratives and discourses in shaping social life, the definition of narrative in social research is still “in dispute” (Andrews et als, 2013, p. 1). Despite the growing interest in narrative, it remains open to different interpretation and application. While for some it is precisely this inclusiveness that, by setting broad parameters for the enterprise (Holsten & Gubrium , 2012), contributes to the increasing popularity and rapid spread of narrative, the vagueness of its definition leaves room for several ambiguities. Among the most relevant are the following two.

First, narrative is both, the method of enquiry and the research object (Clandinin & Connely, 1990; Goodson & Scherto, 2011). The term *life narrative*, for instance, defines the structured quality of experience, as well as the patterns of enquiry for its study (Clandinin & Connely, 1990, p. 2). Hopkins (2009) identifies four meanings associated with the word narrative in research: the narratives collected from research participants to analyse a topic; the narratives written by the researcher to analyse the conceptual underpinnings of the topic being explored; self – reflective narratives woven by the researcher, to inform the research process itself, or “the researcher’s own use of narrative writing as the process that fuels the enquiry” (p. 137).

Second, narrative analysis can be carried out from different onto – epistemological starting points, and from a variety of disciplines. For Livholts & Tamboukou too (2015), the lack of a single approach to narrative research in human and social sciences is one of the causes that render challenging to categorise narrative. In summary, sociologists and anthropologists are interested in approaching narrative research holistically, by understanding narratives in their entirety. On the contrary, the model elaborate by Labov still central to the works of socio – linguists, focusing on the short narrative section, in the structure of telling. Psychological approaches value narratives as episodes involving temporal ordering and progressions and, in particular, as reminded by Bruner (2002), “as attempt through human agency at its restoration” (p.38). Finally, psychoanalysts’ topics of interest concern questions of desire and subjectivity. Therefore, psychoanalytic narrative research tends to focus on how storied are emotionally sequenced, and on the ways silence and language inconsistencies can open up the doors of the unconscious.

Differences in epistemology and ontology foster different ways of conceptualising the narrative approach to research, leaving open several methodological issues. Andrews et. als. (2013) highlights that, in addition to the presence of conflicting approaches, the complexity of narrative research is increased by the lack of overall rules for modes of investigation, sourcing of suitable materials, or “the best level at which to study stories” (p. 1). With regard to the latter, for instance, we might question whether TV programs, interviews, newspapers articles, diaries, everyday speeches, pattern’s activities of people’s everyday life, and even drawing, paintings, photographs anything pictorial - provided that they are associated to well- known stories (Berger, 1997, p. 7) - are all and equally valid sources. According to Miles & Huberman (1994), any text adopted to analyse and provide access to research themes,

should be considered as narrative. This definition includes also “final reports which could be in form of narratives about the study” (in Goodson & Scherto, 2011, p.?). The problem of sources, also raises the issue of what should be considered the unit of analysis of narrative enquiry. Some researchers focus on “speech units as small as brief utterance” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p.1) or “topical stories about a particular event or specific character” (p.1), others analyse “extended speech acts about substantial or compelling aspect of life – relationship, work illness, trauma, or conflict” (p. 1). Some analysts view narratives as something that occurs through long passages of time, such as someone’s entire life, from birth onward. Others consider narratives of large social varieties, such as accounts of political events and social change. Hyvärinen’s (2010) words sum up effectively the dilemma involved when defining narrative: “Is a narrative a type of text? Is it a cognitive capacity or structure? Or is rather a mode of interaction? Or could we cope with a fuzzy – set definition or a prototypical model of narrative?” (p.78). There is no general agreement on the answer to these questions.

Similar problems occur in discourse and discourse analysis. As the term ‘discourse’ has become extremely popular in the past decades (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2012), the array of ways in which it has been conceptualised has given rise to numerous different theoretical perspectives, rendering its definition rather problematic (Dunn & Neumann, 2016). Glynos et als. (2009) point out that, over the last century discourse has acquired a variety of meanings, ranging from “natural language, speech, and writing, to almost anything that acts as a carrier of signification, including social and political practices, to discourse as an ontological horizon”

(p. 5). This inconsistency is reflected in the variety of methodological approaches to discourse analysis, which renders them difficult to organize in a coherent theoretical framework (Glynos et als., 2009). Having defined ontology as “the study of the nature of being – what the world consists of”, and epistemology as the analysis of “how we obtain knowledge about the world” (p.19), Dunn & Neumann (2016) suggest that, the ontological and epistemological differences reflected in the various conceptions of discourse are so numerous and diversified, that ontology and epistemology could be adopted as the parameters through which discourse analysts signal their diverse disciplinary fields. In a similar way, Glynos et al., (2009) proposes that the three dimensions of *ontology*, *focus* and *purpose* can be assumed as criteria to classify different approaches to discourse analysis. In his view, ontological reflections concern “the nature of subjectivity and agency, the nature of social relations and structures, or the nature of their interaction” (p. 5). These considerations shape the ways in which different approaches understand discourse, delimit object and level of analysis, and treat linguistic and non – linguistic elements. Focus pertains to “the level of analysis linked to the object of study” (p.5). For instance, along a micro/macro axis, different studies may differ, depending on their focus on interaction or text, a whole practice, or a regime of practices, while, along a linguistic/non-linguistic axis, the focus can concern speech, text, images, or sounds, and so on. Finally, *purpose* pertains the motivation of the research, whether it is primarily explanatory or critical, and if explanation and critique operate separately or are articulated in the practice of research.

While the suggestion of a unified idea of narrative or of discourse is, obviously, unfeasible, due to the number of theoretical and epistemological perspectives

currently available, (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015), all the approaches to narrative and discourse analysis share a few points that can be identified as follow.

The first common point is the refusal of positivism as an epistemological position dictating the separation between “observer” and “observed” and establishing the purpose of social science as the identification of laws to explain and predict social phenomena (Sparti, 2002). All narrative and discursive approaches share the assumption that the object of the study of sociology deeply differs from that of natural science, as the social world is endowed with *meaning*. Narrative and discursive methods assume that social actors are the first interpreters of social phenomena. As they are engaged in living, telling, re-telling and reliving their stories, researchers’ task is to construct second - order interpretations, after analysing people’s narratives. Social phenomena do not exist as objective realities in the external world, they are not just “out of there” (Goodson and Scherto, 2011, p.18) rather, they are the outcome of complex dynamics involving researchers too.

In brief, social reality is always a construction mediated by human consciousness.

The second common point rests in the fact that all the approaches to narrative share an interest in the role of language in shaping the social world and social relationships. The language, this “object reluctant to be reduced” (Formigari, 2001, p. VI), is approachable from different theoretical perspectives, but it always can be conceptualised as an interface between the self and the community, making narrative the ideal means to explore the intersection of individual biography and society (Andrews et.al. 2000).

The third common point concerns the degree of convergence existing among scholars with regard to the occurrence of a ‘narrative turn’, albeit with differences relating to

when it would occur. The expression *narrative turn*<sup>6</sup> refers to the increasing popularity enjoyed by narratives in social sciences, in the last decades of the twentieth century. This renewed interest in life histories, biographies and storytelling can, usually, be traced back to the general interest in language. This, according to some, has its roots in the 60s, when the study of narrative was detached from the analysis of particular literary genres to be conducted “for its own sake” (Hyvärinen, 2010, p. 72), while, for others, was the consequence of the crisis of the realist tradition of representation, in the 1980s (Bruner, 2003). Goodson & Scherto (2011) link the *narrative turn* to the emergence of a new wave of philosophical discussion, challenging the positivist approach to social world and human experience, and profoundly questioning “the relationship between self, other, community, social, political, and historical dynamics” (p.18). Andrews et.al. (2000) relate the “narrative moment” (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015, p.38) to a context of deep transformations in the field of social sciences, where a broader linguistic and cultural turn promoted the recognition of both, the shaping effects of cultural environments and the subjective experience. Squire (2005) lists the many social - scientific shifts that occurred between the twentieth and the twenty – first centuries. According to her, narrative turn can be associated to:

Turns to qualitative methods, to language, to the biographical, to the unconscious, to participant – centred research, to ecological research, to the social (in psychology), to the visual (in sociology and anthropology), to the power, to culture, to reflexivity [and thus] looking at the ‘narrative turn’ is to view a snapshot of what these turns have yielded. (Squire, 2005, p.91, in Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015, p. 38).

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<sup>6</sup> For a definition of narrative turn see: Polikinghorne,1988; Czarniawska,2004; Goodson and Scherto2011; Hyvarinen2010.



Riessman (2005) places at the origin of the narrative turn the fragmentation of leading narratives of theory, such as Marxism; the 'memoir boom' in literature and popular culture; the raise of emancipation movements supporting the rights of ethnic and sexual minorities and, finally, the "burgeoning therapeutic culture" (p. 1), promoting the exploration of personal life through different kind of therapies. Langellier (2001) considers the disintegration of master narratives as the cause of the flourishing of personal narratives of ordinary or marginalised individuals, claiming their identities and clarifying their experiences by telling or writing their stories. Resisting a straightforward chronological approach, Hyvarinen (2010) suggests that the "narrative mania" (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015, p.5) can be conceived, as consisting of three different phases: a first phase characterised by an interest in research and literary theory, a second phase during which narrative research is recognised as a proper field of study, and a third phase corresponding to the consolidation of the true identity concept. He, subsequently, suggests not to consider the narrative turn as a unique and fixed event, rather, as four different turns: the turn in literary theory in 19060s, the turn in historiography, the turn in social science from 1980s onward and, finally, "a more broadly cultural and societal turn to narration" (p.69). This approach to the narrative turn highlights the heterogeneity of ideas and attitudes towards the narrative, according to the agenda of the different disciplines. This approach offers/ed a more complex image of the ways in which the interest in narratives has been articulated in the various disciplines, and at different historical moments, keeping together common interests, and discontinuities According to the Finnish scholar, narrative does not, simply travel from discipline to discipline, but "it is radically re-created, re-evaluated and transposed" (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015, p. 6).

The *narrative turn* is certainly relevant to the development of the concept of discourse, as structuralism and post-structuralist are often counted among the philosophies and disciplines, exerting a fundamental influence on discourse theory. Livholts & Tamboukou (2012) include post-structuralism, post-colonial, feminism and critical post humanist thought, as the most relevant traditions to discourse theory. Dunn & Neumann, (2016) encompass structuralism, the Frankfurt school and post-positivism among the currents of thoughts that have shaped the various approaches to discourse analysis. These schools of thought have given rise to such large number of methods, that would be impossible to mention them all. Glynos et al. (2009) compare Political Discourse Theory, Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA), Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) in Critical Discourse Analysis, Interpretive Policy Analysis, Discursive Psychology. Dunn & Neumann (2016) differentiate primarily between discourse analysis applied in linguistic studies, mentioning Gee's work, and discourse analysis employed in social sciences. Among the latter, they further differentiate between Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Post-Structuralist approaches. In following sections, I will discuss structuralism and post-positivism. Subsequently, following Dunn & Neumann, I will highlight the differences between Critical Discourse Analysis and post-structuralist approach. Finally, I will summarise key concepts, and define the assumptions underpinning this work, and the concept of discourse I have adopted.

## **1.2. Theories and approaches to Discourse**

Structuralist theories of discourse were inspired by De Saussure's (2009) distinction between *langue* and *parole* - where *langue* is a system of signs constituting the code of a language, while *parole* identifies the individual and concrete linguistic act of a speaker. Discourse theories influenced by structuralism are underpinned by the idea that the manifest social interactions are determined and shaped by a latent structure underlying social phenomena, a "relational system in the form of a fixed grammar" which was "hidden and latent in the social domain" (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 25). This approach focuses on language as a system of signs whose logic reflects a wider logic, informing all human social life. De Saussure's and his scholars' interest lays on the structure where a sign is connected to the other, in a system of relations. Critics of the structuralism have pointed out how this approach neglects the role of the social context. The Russian philosopher Bakhtin (1990a; 1990b; 1993) was the first to claim the importance of focusing on the utterance – rather than on the systems or rules underpinning it - and on the social context where the enunciation occurs. He shifted the attention from the *langue* to the *parole* – from the discourse to the speech - arguing the need for a *trans-linguistic* science, focused on the dialogical relations between words, texts, and people. Bakhtin's concepts of *intertextuality* and *intersubjectivity* are particularly relevant to understand contemporary approaches to discourse. Intertextuality requires texts to be conceptualised, as dynamic sites where different relational processes and practices intersect, rather than static self-contained systems. Texts should be understood as "traces and tracing of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures" (Martinez Alfaro, 1996, p. 268). The concept of intersubjectivity is underpinned by the notions of 'Heteroglossia' and 'dialogism'. The former referring to the plurality of socially and ideologically determined discourse types used by speaker, while the latter to the

“encountering of these discourses in speech” (Steinby & Klapuri, 2013, p. Xiii). Intersubjectivity, therefore, defines the commitment of the speaker, involved in producing a speech with other speakers, selecting relevant discourses. It refers: “to the individual’s involvement, in any given encounter with interlocutors, in a process of speech production based on a variety of socially determined discourses” (Steinby & Klapuri, 2013, p. XIII). Far from being relegated to a position assigned to him by the linguistic system (cf. Benveniste, 1966), Bakhtin’s speaker is active, in spite of the constraints posed by the range of discourse types. Indeed, the speaking subject, “in a speech situation, not only makes choices from among a vast number of socially relevant modes of discourse, but also responds individually to the specific content and circumstances of his or her interlocutor’s message” (Steinby & Klapuri, 2013, p. Xiii).

The Frankfurt school furthered the development of discourse analysis as a social science, for its members, influenced by neo -Marxism, focused on social theory, as a means to criticise the existing order, and promote social emancipation and alternative styles of life. Consistently with their post-positivist approach, they claimed that it is epistemologically and methodologically impossible to render the experience of reality directly, rather discourse must be “understood as merged text and social materiality” (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 29). Foucault (1970; 1973; 1978; 1979), a philosopher considered close to Frankfurt school, provided a fundamental contribution to the development of the concept of discourse and its applications to social analysis.

In his view, discourse not only mediates knowledge, which is always contingent, but defines the structure and the system of rules, shaping individuals’ identities that are “more fundamental than the assertions of the individuals thinking in the space”

(Gutting 1994, p. 10 in Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p.2 9). As supported by Foucault, social relations are not hidden within a latent structure in language, rather they are manifest in language and, thus, given in the discourse.

### **1.2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Post-structuralist approach**

While discourse analysis is widely employed in Linguistic studies<sup>7</sup>, with attention to the language in use, and to the interaction between language and other social practices (behaviour, custom, eating, dressing among others), I will focus on the application of discourse in social sciences, particularly on two approaches: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and a series of approaches grouped under the category of post-structuralism.

The main difference between the CDA and poststructuralist social science approaches is that the former assumes the existence of a knowable reality outside discourse, asserting the presence of two realms, the discursive and the extra-discursive, a claim that gained CDA scholars the label of “realists” or “critical realists” (Fairclough 2003; Rapley, 2008). Human agency would reside within the dynamic relationship between these two dimensions, the discursive and the social. CDA scholars argue that discourses do not encompass all the aspect of social life, therefore assuming “empirical claims about discourse and causality” (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 36) as grounded. Fairclough (1996), for instance, postulate the existence of ‘moments’ of practices “flanking” the discursive moments, within social life. From this perspective,

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<sup>7</sup> See Gee 1999, 2005, 2011.

discourses can be conceptualised as devices that “foster common perceptions and understandings for specific purposes” (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 3 in: Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 36) and have causal effects on practices. Addressing the ontology which support this approach, CDA followed in the footsteps of structuralism. In fact, assuming an extra-discursive realm, allows for the conceptualisation of meaning, as constant and accessible through discourses. This position implies, not only, the existence of a cause-and-effect relationship between reality and discourses, but also that the external world can be analysed, by focusing on the structure of language.

Deriddà’s (1974) quote “*There is nothing outside the text*” (p. 158 in: Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 40, emphasis in the original) expresses well the main assumption underpinning all post – structuralist approaches. In fact, poststructuralists reject the distinction between discursive and non – discursive practices, claiming that everything can be studied as text. Poststructuralists do not refute the existence of a real world independent from human knowledge, rather they argue that the objects of the world become knowable to us only “through discursive meaning making” (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 40). Discourses, therefore, do not allow access to an already established, reality but “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1970, p. 49). This implies the refusal of any transcendental dimension, even the one offered by referents. As stated by Torfing (2005) “There is no transcendental centre [i.e., referent] that structure the entire structure” (p. 8). In this perspective, the researcher’s task does not consist in uncovering truths. Rather, it is the mapping of the discursive strategies that produce objects and subjects, showing the power relations embedded and reproduced in discourses, and connecting these mechanisms of power to practice and materiality.

### 1.2.2. Key points on discourse

In this paragraph, following Dunn & Neumann's (2016) approach, I will focus on some key points on discourse, which will support the assumptions underpinning my understanding of discourse in this work.

#### 1. Language and texts:

Discourse analysis is supported by the assumption that all the things, constituting reality, objects, subjects, and material structures, are endowed with a linguistical construct. In fact, speakers differentiate among objects, subjects, and events, assigning them values through language. With Milliken's words: "Through language discourses produce background capacities for persons to differentiate and identify subjects/objects, to ascribe upon them attributes and values, and place them in relationship with other objects" (Milliken 1999 p. 231 in: Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 43). Meaning, as a core characteristic of sociality, should be considered in all social analysis, and should be understood "as traceable in language not in each individual mind" (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 44). Despite the absence of any fixed connection or direct reference between the extra-linguistic world and language, the latter is the field where the extra-discursive reality of social and political practices are constituted and detected. It follows that these practices can be read as a text, that is, as a system of signs. Language is a vehicle for understanding social, political and cultural phenomena, for is within language that "meaning-making and action-taking in the social realm are constructed and contested" (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 43).

#### 2. Production of knowledge

Discourses create the social world and the ways in which subjects communicate comprehensibly certain ways of being in, and acting toward the world, excluding alternative possibilities of actions or modes of identity. By enabling and constraining, they operationalise a particular “regime of truth”, producing subjects, objects, common- sense, knowledgeable practices, subjects as audience, and subjects authorised to speak.

### 3. Discourses and Power

Resulting from the previous points, it follows that there is an intrinsic relationship between discourse and power. Discourses work both, to enable and to silence, by excluding and by “limiting and restricting authorities and experts to some groups, but not to others, endorsing a certain common sense, but making other modes of categorizing and judging meaningless, impracticable, inadequate or otherwise disqualified” (Milliken, 1999, p. 229 in: Dunn & Neman, 2016, p. 54). Discourses define normality, or even naturality, by providing the framework within which ideas and practices are considered ‘the norm’. In fact, what appears ‘normal’ won’t be questioned, for neither the dominant nor the dominated subjects are aware that things could be different, or, in other words, they both ignore the presence of the “structural bias that the behavioural context offers” (Foucault, 1974, pp. 23 - 24, in: Dunn & Neman, 2016, p. 56). The relationship between power and discourses is, however, interactional: if power shapes discourses, in turn, discourses shape power. As result, both power and discourses are never totally centralised, but engage in complex circular interactions.

### 4. Representation and Practice

Representations and practices do not require to be conceived as unrelated, as the former have deep political implications, enabling “actors to ‘know’ the object and to



act upon what they ‘know’ [...]” (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 60), establishing the preconditions and the parameters for actions. It is worth noting that discourses do not explain the reasons for making particular choices, rather they only present a range of imaginable options to social actors. As pointed out by Dunn & Neumann (2016), in order to effectively analyse individual decision-making, discourse analysis needs to be supplemented by other methods, keeping in mind, however, that in addition to methodological compatibility, “one should be sensitive to the possible existence of an epistemological divide on the issue of causality” (p. 61).

#### 5. Discourse and Materiality

Though the *narrative turn* in social sciences reoriented the study of social interaction in language, materiality was not neglected. Discourse concept should not be confined to the realm of ideas, rather it should also include the material one. Instead of privileging one domain over the other, discourse should incorporate material and ideational factors, both conceptualised to enable their study. Discourse analysis should, thus, focus on the role of language in creating the pre-conditions for actions, and on “how a given statement activates or initiates a series of social practices, and how the statement in turn confirms or disproves these practices” (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 68).

#### 6. Subject positions

While in sociology roles define a set of norms, relations and actions bound to specific contexts, subject positions are more general, referring to broader ways of living or behaving (Dunn & Neumann, 2016). Within discourse, subject positions are shaped by specific subjects, who can create new meaning/s, position, and actions, according to their interests. Both, post-colonialist studies and feminist theory scholars have focused on the creation of the “subalterns” (Spivak, 1987) within discursive

formations, and on the relation of individuals and groups to these discourses. Subjects – however – should not be perceived as mechanically adopting the positions mapped out for them by discourses, for their relation with roles is more complex, as they can accept or reject certain elements implicit in discourses, and be critical towards others. As noted by Mills (1997), “[...] Individual subjects are constantly weighing up their own perception of their own positions in relation to these discursive norms against what they assume other individuals or groups perceive their position to be. In this way, the process of finding a position for oneself within discourse is never fulfilled” (p. 97, in: Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 77).

### **1.3. 3 A definition of ‘discourse’**

Due to its popularity, discourse has been conceptualised in a variety of different ways, giving rise to a multiplicity of definitions. A by no means exhaustive list would include the definition of discourse as:

- “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1970, p 49)
- “a system of dispersion between objects, types of statements, concepts, or thematic choices” that form “a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functioning, transformations)” (Foucault, 1970, p. 38)
- “a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64)
- “Ways of being in the world, they are forms of life” (Gee, 1996, p. Viii)

- Sets of linguistic material that are coherent in organisation and content and enable people to construct meaning in social context” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2008, p. 389)
- “Present as that which is absent; it becomes an empty signifier, as the signifier of this absence” (Lacalu1, 996, p. 44)
- “a system of statement in which each individual statement makes sense, produces interpretative possibilities by making it virtually impossible to think outside of it” (Doty, 1993, p. 302)
- “as system of statements for the organization of practices” (Bartleson, 1995, p. 71)
- “background capacities for persons to differentiate and identify things, giving them taken for granted qualities and attributes, and relating them to other objects” (Milliken, 1999, p. 231)
- “a structure of meaning in use” (Weldes & Saco,1996, p. 373)
- “a system of meaning production rather than simply statements or language, systems that ‘fix’ meaning, however temporally, and enable us to make sense of the world” (Shepherd, 2008, p.10).

My understanding of discourse aligns with post-structuralist assumptions, and is underpinned by the key points outlined in the previous paragraph. It is also influenced by Foucault’s idea of power, and by his belief that identities are constructed through discourses. However, I argue that Foucault’s notion of individuals as completely created by discursive formations is problematic, and fails to acknowledge the ability of the subjects to negotiate meanings. I shall return on this point several times in this work. For now, I shall simply state my belief in discourses as systems of meaning

production - including representations and practices, establishing subject positions and restricting individuals' shifting toward alternative ones. This restriction is obtained through the dispositive of power/knowledge – in Foucauldian terms, clouding individuals' chance to grasp a *residue* – a distance- between them and the positions which are intended for them. Though my definition is not too distant from Foucault's it differs in one respect as, despite discourses restraining social actors' agency, these can counteract them, under certain circumstances. One of these is the amount of affect – the elephant in the room in social science (Wetherell, 2012) - circulating around discourses. Affect can be conceptualised as an energy that “is not in”, or indeed “outside of” the individual, or the social, relating instead to the circulation of emotion between different sites, objects or bodies;” and “that this circulation of emotion works, in and through discourse” (Milani and Richardson, 2021, p.675). Wetherell (2012) suggests turning to an approach based on ‘affective practices’, to understand how social formation ‘grab’ people. As a consequence, it is reasonable to conclude that affect and emotions play a role in opening/closing the space available for social actor when they are “interpellated or called into subject position” to occupy or reject them (Dun and Neumann, 2016, p. 50). Similarly, I understand narratives as practices - interwoven with power/knowledge relations - through which subjects constitute themselves. Power intervenes in creating conditions of possibility for specific narratives to emerge as dominant, and for other to be marginalised. Affect engages subject with context, through a specific cultural process involving brain and body (Wetherell, 2012), and pushing people toward/away specific positions. In the next paragraph, I will review the literature on the themes of discourse, narrative and racism. I will not analyse the academic research on trauma here as I have dedicated the entire chapter III to it. Therefore, more space will be

allocated in section 1.3 to the analysis of the narrative construction of racism in public opinion.

### **1.3 Literature Review**

#### **1.3.1 Public Opinion**

In the 50s, when the scientific study of public opinion was institutionalised in academia (Obershchall, 2008), the main methods of investigating people's ideas consisted of surveys and questionnaires<sup>8</sup>, particularly when dealing with controversial themes, as racial inequalities.

However, over time, an increasing number of studies began to highlight the drawbacks of quantitative methods, in particular, how cognitive bias and the wording of questions affected people's answers, rendering results unreliable (Bishop, 2005). Especially criticised was the absence of any form of reflexivity positivistic-oriented research, neglecting, both the role of the context and the influence of researcher's subjectivity on the research process. These limitations appeared noteworthy, considering that public opinion had been recognised as a political force, by eighteenth century thinkers, as Rousseau, Bentham, Tocqueville, Bryce, Lord Acton (Obershchall, 2008).

Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922) proved an exception. Lippmann was familiar with the works of Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde on the psychology of

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<sup>8</sup> See for instance Marsden, 2012; Luntz, 2009; Simon & Abdel Moneim 2010

masses, as well as those of Freud and Jung. In his *Public Opinion*, he focused on the psychological obstacles, preventing individuals from accessing ‘fact’ and information, pointing out the role of the internal images in constructing representations of the world. He was the first to refer to stereotypes as interpretative filters - provided by culture - between observation and ‘facts’. Lippmann also remarked the role of the in reinforcing and distorting the/se cultural schemata. Since then, a plethora of theories on public opinion has flourished, investigating its nature, the dynamics of its formation and changes, and the more suitable methodologies to investigate it<sup>9</sup>. Yet, two are the most relevant approaches for this work.

The first refers to the field of socio-linguistic, cognitive, and social psychology, increasingly shifting the focus from the opinions to the formation of opinions, emphasising the role of the individual mind and its cognitive mechanisms, in determining how people make sense of their worlds (see: Aronson, 1997, for an account of the bias involved in the social cognition). The second line of research can be traced back to critical social theory, focusing on the power relationship between ruling and the subaltern classes. Foucault, for instance, conceived the concept of Population, as a historical object constructed and controlled through discourses, allowing a new technology of Bio-power to manage large groups. Drawing on his insights, CDA engages largely with critique power relations in texts, and talks and problematises a “construction of languages that (re)produces asymmetrical power relations” (Donoghue, 2018, p. 392). These two approaches will be further discussed when reviewing van Dijk’s discourse analysis as an example of CDA, and Claudia

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<sup>9</sup> for a summary of these topics see: Donsbach & Traugott 2008; Oskamp & Schultz 2005; Glynn, Herbst O’Keefe, Shapiro & Lindeman 2004.

Strauss' conventional discourses, mainly drawing on cognitive anthropology, especially on D' Andrade's (1992) work and the schema theory.

### **1.3.2 The “New Racism” and Van Dijk’s discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis has been fruitfully applied to the study of the so called ‘new racism’ by Van Dijk (1992; 1993) who focused on the role of texts, talks, journalistic news, stories, and storytelling, in the reproduction of ethnic prejudices. Van Dijk claimed discourse analysis’ theoretical and methodological relevance in the study of racial or ethnic discrimination, especially when considering the new form assumed nowadays by racism. According to Van Dijk, in Western countries, the paradigm of biological inferiority has been replaced by that of the “culture differences”. where the “Others” are not constitutionally, genetically, inferior, rather they, simply, belong to a different culture. However, the culture of the “Others” is always somewhat lacking, defective, or faulty, and needs to be corrected. While this attitude, also known as “Ethnicism” (Mullard, 1986), implies the recognition of ‘multi-ethnic equality’, it implicitly presupposes an ethnic or cultural hierarchy order. Through the labels ‘new racism’, ‘symbolic racism’, or ‘everyday racism’, many scholars have tried to conceptualise this kind of ethnic discrimination, attempting to overcome the academic distinction between macro-structure and micro-processes, or between institutional and individual racism.

Essed (1990; 1991), for instance, adopts the concept of ‘every-day racism’ to highlight that racism is reproduced in a person’s familiar environment, that includes both, the physical space and their whole system of social relations. As a consequence,

racism is “routinely created and reinforced through everyday practices” (p. 24), in a space where the “institutional” and “interactional”, the “private and public” spheres merge to form a complex of social relations and situations. The “practices” Essed refers to, should not be understood solely as “acts”, but as complex relations of acts and attitudes, which are recurrent, systematic, and familiar to social actors who concur in maintaining and managing the system. From this perspective, racism is a process, rather than a structure or an ideology.

### **1.3.2.1 Storytelling and the reproduction of racism**

Van Dijk (2000) pointed out that, by being subtle, indirect, and symbolic, “many forms of ‘new’ racism are discursive” (p. 34). Indeed, ethnic inequalities can be expressed and enacted through different practices, as everyday conversations, board meetings, job interviews, policies, law, parliamentary debates, textbook, movies, and political propaganda. Racism, as a social system of ‘racial’ or ‘ethnic’ inequality comprises a social component, and also a cognitive element for practices also includes attitudes. The social component can be understood at a micro-level of analysis, consisting of everyday discriminatory practices, or at the macro-level of the organisations, institutions, legal arrangements, and other societal structures. Both levels imply a socio-cognitive dimension: the ethnic ideologies and attitudes shared by a group at macro-level, and the specific ethnic beliefs held by single social actors at the micro level. Van Dijk attempts to formulate a causal explanation of racism, by referring to this latter dimension. The cognitive dimension of social practices - the “knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values” (p. 36) - held by individuals, is



responsible for their engagement in discriminatory practices, as their actions are guided by the whole set of their beliefs.

The two levels (micro and macro) and the two dimensions mentioned (social action/structures and social cognition) are multiply interrelated, thus, these different orders of discourse can be analysed according to the same principles through a discursive approach. Discourses, indeed, belong to both dimensions described above as they are social practices, occurring at the level of institutions, organisations, legal arrangement, societal structures, and at the level of micro-daily interactions. Discourses also provide people with those beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, norms and values with a foundation for their behaviour. In short, discourses provide the “the main source for people’s racist beliefs” (p. 36). One of the advantages in employing van Dijk’s concept of Discourse is epistemological, as it supports the understanding of the interface “between social and cognitive dimension of racism” (p. 36).

While he adopted his discourse analysis to investigate a wide range of fields (politics, media, discourse of corporations and scholars) I shall focus, here, on his study of everyday conversation and storytelling. According to Van Dijk (1993), stories differ from other kind of texts, contributing to the reproduction of racism, due to their peculiar form, in a specific way. Having focused on the main features of a story, drawing on a rich corpus of narratives theories from literary and psychological studies<sup>10</sup>, Van Dijk concludes that stories are the expression of situation models - mental representations of events occurring in specific social situations, which play an important role in discourse production and comprehension. People construct constantly new models in order to organise new information, or update older models regarding past events they have experienced. Models are richer than the texts they

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<sup>10</sup> see for details Van Dick, 1993, p. 123

generate as they represent the interpretation of the events, and include the opinion on them. Finally, he points out that models are organised according to an abstract schema containing categories as: Setting, Participants, Actions which can be identified, as well, in the semantic structure of the stories describing/narrating the model.

Stories are not told just to entertain or to describe events, rather, they maintain and legitimate dominant powers and ideologies, by contributing to the reproduction of the whole set of a social group's values, ideologies, norms and beliefs. This is clearly demonstrated by the "persuasive 'point'" of the stories about minorities (p. 126), drawing their argumentative strength from being told as first-hand accounts. This characteristic present them as a reliable source, and ideal evidence to draw broader, and usually negative, conclusions on ethnic minorities. In other words, this strategy allows the storytellers to implicitly claim: 'look, this come from my lived experience, thus, it is based on facts not on bias'.

To qualify as narratable, stories should satisfy the following conditions. Firstly, they should be remarkable examples of inter-groups encounters. In mixed contexts, this condition is satisfied when, for instance, they highlight non-trivial differences, activities, and properties between minorities groups, and own group members. Stories, then, implicitly, or explicitly, draw a comparison between an ethnic situation, and situations in which only white people are involved. Secondly, the story should provide a negative evaluation of minorities, with positive experiences being much less common subjects for prejudiced white people. From a cognitive perspective, this implies that such experiences are not stored and interpreted as positive. According to Van Dijk (1993) this is particularly the case if "the communicative function of the story is to support a negative conclusion about minorities" (p. 127). In this case, models of positive encounters might be discounted as irrelevant, to allow the point to

be made, and assert the stereotypical prejudice. For Van Dijk: “If stories about minorities are primarily told to support a more general negative conclusion, we should conversely expect them to be instantiations of ethnics or racial stereotypes and prejudices” (p. 127).

Stories about minorities are about “white as (self-defined) victims of minority group members or of ethnic relations in general” (p. 127). The negative act told should be interpreted as a potential threat to white people, if not to the white group. Conversely, stories presenting blacks as the victims of discrimination, or of racist attacks will be seldom told by whites, “especially prejudiced whites” (p. 127). The class of events, in which blacks are seen as responsible agents, and white as innocent victims, ranges from crime and violence to economic, politics and culture. Stories supporting general prejudices about economic competition, political power, social privileges, and cultural threats, can be expected, as the narrative strategy moves from the perception of difference to a remarkable but acceptable difference, to the evaluation of negative deviance and threat. The more persuasive these narratives are in making the negative argumentative point, the more prototypical they are as ‘minority stories’. In fact, the primary aim of a minority story is to persuade the audience of an argumentative point, implying, for prejudiced storytellers – the nearly constant negative characterisation of “them” as opposed to a victim role for “us”.

However, Van Dijk points out that, spontaneous positive stories about minorities or race relations can also be identified as counter-stories, namely stories, intending to challenge prevailing prejudices. It is worth noting that, according to the author, such counter-stories presuppose a lack of (blatant) prejudices. From the researcher’s perspective, a counter-story is a rather reliable indicator of the lack of, or less

aggressive prejudices. I will return to the contradiction raised by Van Dijk's position in the following paragraph.

### **1.3.2. 2 Concluding remarks on Van Dijk's theory on racism**

Van Dijk conceptualises racism as a system of white group dominance which is reproduced at several levels, in particular through discourse and communication. Among different genres of discourse, storytelling allows people to express their experiences and evaluations of tangible 'ethnics events'. Such stories are, usually, functional elements within overall argumentative strategies of negative other-presentation. For Van Dijk, prejudiced people need to support negative statements about immigrants with 'evidence', in order to avoid being considered racists. Negative stories - being reported as events that people have witnessed or taken part in themselves - are presented as purely stating "the facts", by providing the required evidence. However, not all the stories provide the same overall negative evaluation of ethnic minorities. Van Dijk also points out the systematic difference between stories told by prejudiced people, and those narrated by fautors of equality, actively opposed to racism. Indeed, the formers' stories describe events and experiences that will confirm negative attitudes. "Such stories are as stereotypical as the attitudes that monitor the construction and retrieval of the mental models on which they are based" (p.130). The latters' stories present more nuanced and positive tales. White people who have few or no problems with minorities will "occasionally even tell negative stories about racist or intolerant whites" (p.130). I find this passage problematic for its circular reasoning, stating that prejudiced people tell prejudiced stories. Van Dijk states that people engage in discriminatory behaviours as they are guided by negative

values and beliefs toward ethnic minorities. Negative stories are the expression of stereotyped models which, in turn, are fostered and reinforced by negative storytelling. This approach might provide a valid description of how discrimination occurs and is reinforced, but it fails to explain the reason of why people are racist. In addition to this, Van Dijk claims that stories about minorities are the expression of group's experiences rather than personal's. While personal experiences with "others" are viewed as experiences of the white group, the stories told by prejudiced people - and the models they are derived from - are heavily controlled by general beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies. These 'minorities stories' are somewhat similar to myths and folktales: anonymous stories of group experiences, expressing group concerns, and beliefs. By stating that people's discourses and identities are, mainly, moulded by forces beyond their control (as group beliefs), Van Dijk leaves little space to social actors' agency. Indeed, he seems to split the social world in two: people with prejudices and people who "have no or fewer problems with minorities" (p. 140), implying that ideology plays the greater role in shaping opinions and constructing identities. However, it can be argued that, in a complex society, a wide repertoire of values, ideologies, and knowledge available to the individuals exists, and that people can draw on them, according to the lived situation. Therefore, the reason as to why some people still choose to embrace racist beliefs, while others do not. Van Dijk's theory does not clarify the attraction created by racist ideas. Furthermore, reality is nuanced, as the same person can express incoherent or even opposite points of view on a topic, a problem that has been addressed in detail by Claudia Strauss (2012) whose approach I shall discuss later. While Van Dijk's theoretical model does not account for the heterogeneity of opinions within the same community - as members of the same social group are supposed to share the same social cognitions - it, also,

fails to explain the reasons for the fluctuation of opinions over a period, and struggles in explaining changes, resulting in it being a static model.

### 1.3.3. Claudia Strauss and conventional discourses

Claudia Strauss's book *Making Sense of Public Opinion: American Discourses about Immigration and Social Programs* (2012) is the result of her longstanding investigation in how people internalise cultural messages, form their own opinions and often combine conflicting points of views, without identifying any contradiction. Strauss's research is based on primary sources collected through semi-structured interviews<sup>11</sup>, conducted by phone and in person with people in North Caroline; and has also employed editorials, blogs, political speeches, advocacy group, Web sites, murals and political cartoons, as secondary sources. Among other sources considered by Strauss were the 2000-2010 National surveys, whose wording mimicked that of vernacular conventional discourses.

Moving from a background in cognitive anthropology and schema theory, she found the connection point between individual and society, in the concept of 'schema', or of 'cultural model'. In cognitive research, the 'cultural model' - a 'culturally formed cognitive schemas' (Quinn and Holland, 1987), had been used to explain the dual nature of culture, as a collective and public phenomenon, requiring to be internalised individually by social actors, in order to be reproduced. Cultural models, furthermore, provide a "third way" to avoid psychobiological and socio-cultural determinism,

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<sup>11</sup> The sample utilised consisted of thirteen women and thirteen men six of which identified themselves as black/African Americans, twenty as white/European Americans and one as mixed

implying that private interpretations are not replicas of public messages, but can be combined and shaped by individuals (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992).

Building on her previous research, Strauss defines a “conventional discourse” as “often repeated shared schemas” (p. 60), i.e. a discourse based on cultural models. Like cultural models, conventional discourse works as a stereotypical and simplified version of reality, focusing on some aspect of an issue, while neglecting the others. Differently from traditional cognitive research, however, Strauss’s schemas refer only to explicit models, neglecting all implicit knowledge that is the focus of much research in cognitive anthropology. Strauss’s key concepts are *conventional discourses* and *opinion community*.

### **1.3.3.1 Conventional discourses and opinion communities**

Strauss’s concept of *conventional discourse* is grounded on a usage-based constructionist approach to language acquisition, according to which people learn languages by paying attention to typical combination of forms and meanings, rather than applying abstract rules. Speakers do not shape discourse according to rules, retrieving instead old language from memory to reshape it to the current context. At the base of this theory lies a pragmatic and context-related approach to language, looking to the material aspects of words, including their sound and wording, rather than their content and meaning. Drawing on Bakhtin, Strauss highlights that we are so influenced by other people’s comments, that our words are “half ours and half - someone’s else” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 345, in: Strauss, 2012, p. 15). We do not only borrow our ideas from others, but also our words. The canned sound of much commentary depends on the constant repetition of others’ words.

Conventional discourses are exchanged especially among members of an *opinion community*, that is a group of people sharing a certain approach to discussing particular arguments, a group “among whom opinion are discussed or assumptions on certain topics are taken for granted and do not need to be discussed” (p. 15). Opinion communities might be real and comprise one’s social networks (co-workers, neighbours, or on- line friends), or “imagined communities”, as fellow members of a profession, a political movement, an ethnicity, a religion, a nation, or, even, the audience for a media figure. These communities can be close knit, as those including close friends, or loose as those formed within a workplace, bringing together individuals through a wide range of discourses. Even within a loose opinion community, members are so familiar with each other’s views that, one’s use of a keyword could trigger a set of associated assumptions about the speaker’s thoughts, in the other members’ minds. This explains why citizens of a nation state, can be considered as belonging to a loose opinion community, for even if they hold different opinions on an issue, they are familiar with that topic for hearing it being discussed it in the media, and can recognise the rhetoric and ideas of fellow citizens in a way the outsiders cannot. Obviously, each individual is part of multiple opinions community at the same time.

### **1.3.3.2 Stating Opinions**

Previous theories on public opinion can be divided in two groups: those who believe that people select the one discourse, fitting their current goals at any given time, among the available discourses, and those who assign to elite discourses the power to manipulate the masses. While these theories do not explain the reasons for people’s shift from a conservative conventional discourse to a liberal one, without detecting



any contradiction, Strauss's theory claims people acquire ready-made points from different sources and include them in their repertoire, rather than organising opinions according to standard broad political ideologies. As a consequence, when the wording of a question in a survey, or in a debate evoke it, a conventional discourse is recalled from the repertoire and combined with others. This process does not suggest that people's opinions simply consist of a random collection of stock remarks, passively absorbed. While largely affected by the discourses in their opinion community, people take an active role in filtering discourses, accepting some and rejecting others. Individuals interpret and invest on the same discourses in different ways, depending on their perceived self-interest, their formative experiences and on the degree of compatibility of discourses with their identities, namely, their conscious self-representation. A part of(?) momentary goals, individual life experiences play an important role in enriching some discourses with particular motivation, and emotional relevance. Furthermore, while people are exposed to a variety of conventional discourses in their multiple opinion communities, they do not necessarily agree with everything they hear. They use conventional discourses as building blocks to construe their opinions in accordance with the above-mentioned factors, adopting a range of strategies, including compartmentalisation, true ambivalence and integration, to deal with conflicting discourses.

Stating an opinion is, then, for Strauss, similar to playing a jazz improvisation: someone's comment in an everyday setting, or a research's question work as prompts that call to mind the most relevant conventional discourse or, more precisely, the mental representation of that discourse. It is worth noting that, both the content and the wording of a prompt are relevant as a specific discourse could be triggered by reference to its assumptions, to its characteristic keywords or rhetorical style.

To fully understand Strauss's theory of public opinion it should be pointed out again that a conventional discourse does not offer an overall evaluation of an issue, rather it suggests one aspect of the situation that can be supplemented by a discourse usually associated to the other side, when activated by a comment or a question. Just as in a jazz improvisation, individuals will construct something appropriate for their audience and the occasion on the spot, but will also draw on standardised formulae: "the keywords, phrases, tone, attitude and general rhetorical strategies that the person has heard before, like a familiar musical riff" (p.112).

### **1.3.3.3 Concluding remarks on Strauss' conventional discourse**

Strauss surpasses a longstanding tradition in social sciences that places culture either on the individuals' minds, or within social dynamics (Strauss and Quinn, 2000). According to her, culture is, simultaneously, in the minds of real individuals, in the social world, and in the interaction between an individual's mind and the world. When culture is not framed as an abstract superindividual entity, nor as epiphenomenon of the individual's mental processes, questions about the limit of individual agency are likely to find more satisfying answers. In Strauss's view, social actors are not moulded by forces beyond their control, but still draw on social resources – the conventional discourses – to construct their opinions and deal with the world around them. They play an active role in filtering, negotiating, combining, and interpreting the different conventional discourses, though they are affected by the wider dialogical network of their opinion communities too. Strauss's theoretical framework challenges the idea that the media influence people only in one way. It, also, explains the presence of heterogeneous discourses within the same network, as a person takes part

in many other communities that can provide alternative opinions to those dominating the public sphere, like in the media.

However, I regard her reasons for the ways in individuals choose on discourse over another or their preference for engaging with certain discourses, rather than with others, insufficient. She suggests that, in addition to the influence of opinion communities, individuals select discourses on the base of their identity, perceived self-interest, and life experiences. Strauss defines identity as a person's conscious self-representation, stressing that a perceived interest plays a greater role than an actual self-interest, and that perceptions are partly shaped by discourses. This may explain why at times people support positions that are in clear contrast to their self-interests, but it does not take into account the polarisation, and the considerably *emotional emphasis* that is, not rarely, invested in defending controversial ideas, even those openly denied by facts. For instance, irrational, extremely polarised and emotionally charged opinions are often expressed when dealing with controversial topics as migration. These opinions appear to differ quite profoundly from those examples of conventional discourse provided by Strauss, as they do not seem to be generated by a speaker engaged in combining dynamically different influences, and display a quite low level of heterogeneity. Strauss would argue that richness of discourses also relies on the speaker's personal and social resources, though in the situations described above, polarisation affects even the most prepared speakers.

In reality, the emotional emphasis - pervading public debates – is the sole cause of the polarisation of opinions. As pointed out by Papadopoulos (2021), when dealing with emotionally laden situations, we tend to oversimplify complex issues, conceptualising them in a kind of clear-cut, white or black way. If this is true, the agency that Strauss assigns to social actors is disproportionate as it does not take into

consideration that emotions can 'take' individuals, rather than being effectively processed by them in order to make a choice. How does Strauss deal with emotions? While I think these are not completely neglected in her theory, for she states that individuals 'past experiences can affect which discourses they will accept or reject, as emotions associated to those memories will exert a degree of influence on those choices, though this point is underdeveloped. Influenced by cognitivism, she seems to conceive emotions as the outcome of a cognitive processing of information, from rational social actors, acting on the base of a cost-benefit logic that fails to focus on the most irrational aspects of the human psyche, the complexity and conflicts of people's emotional lives or on the profound ambiguities of motivation and meanings (Craib, 1989). This limit is perhaps fostered by Strauss's view that people reject those discourses that contrast with their identity, conceptualised as conscious self-presentation. Thus, social actors cannot react to contents and forces they are unaware of, unconscious contents that can be, nonetheless, extremely powerful in shaping their behaviours and ideas. I suggest that, the introduction of a psychoanalytic dimension in social research, can create a framework able to address the role of affects and emotions in determining individuals' framing of public issues and to include it in the research process. I shall support later in this work that the Jungian ideas of complex and archetype can account for these aspects, while retaining many of the heuristic advantages of the concept of conventional discourse.

#### **1.3.4 Media and Politics**

The relationship between media and migration has been fruitfully examined in the framework of discursive analysis. Much research in this field has showed that representations of migrants in the media are mostly negative. Van Dijk (2000) has pointed out tendency of the media to represent immigration as a threat, also noting that immigrants are presented in passive roles or as agents of reprehensible acts. The adoption of de-humanising metaphors has been highlighted by scholars from different countries. Migrants have been described alternatively, as “Invaders” and “Flood”, after the fall of the Berlin Wall (McLaughlin, 1999) and in the UK media coverage of migration (Philo and Beattie, 1999). Images of contagion and infection in relation to migration to the USA have been analysed by Santa Ana (1999) while metaphors referring to animals breeding have been observed by Goodman (2007).

The close intertwinement between the two has been critically analysed in more recent contributions in the framework of critical discourse analysis<sup>12</sup>. Researchers agree on the interactive relationship between factual events and their “de-/re-construction through media and political discourse” (Triandafyllidou, 2018, p. 199). As previous studies had already pointed out, this relationship can be detected both, at the level of individual countries, and at European level. Triandafyllidou, Wodak, & Krzyzanowski (2009), for instance, had observed that national media debate international crisis events “in different ways that resonate with national discourses, while also intertwining with common European discursive elements” (p.). While these scholars offer interesting case studies on the discursive mediatisation and politicisation of the crisis in the context of a specific European country, Triandafyllidou (2018), in an effort to “pull the threads”, compares their findings,

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<sup>12</sup> see Krzyzanowski M.; Triandafyllidou A., & Wodak R., 2018; Rheindorf M., & Wodak R., 2017; Vezovnik, A., 2017; Sicurella 2017; Krzyzanowski M., 2017a; Krzyzanowski M., 2017b; Vollmer B., & Karakayali S., 2017; Bennett S. 2017; Colombo M., 2017; Boukala S., & Dimitrakopoulou D, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018

identifying two levels of analysis. At European Union level, a common story line of events can be detected, and three competing interpretive frames for discussing the emergency in media and political speeches can be identified: the moralisation frame, the threat frame, and the frame of rationalisation, reconciling the moralisation and the threat frames.

At individual country's level, various national media and/or national political leaders predated upon specific events perceived as highly relevant at national level.

In Italy, as in many other European countries, migration has been described as a 'threat' with images of 'massive invasion' by a besieging army of 'clandestine', 'irregular', 'illegal' or 'undocumented' migrants at the core of political, media and institutional discourses. In the 90s and from 2001 until 2006, in political debates, parties from the right, and the extreme right have presented migration as a problem affecting Italians' safety and economic security, defining "the term of the debate in populist slogan" (Colombo, 2018, p. 163; Ter Wal, 1996, 2000; Qaussoli, 2013; Geddes, 2008).

Colombo (2018) has analysed Matteo Renzi's speech, delivered in Parliament in the aftermath of the drowning tragedy occurred in the Mediterranean-sea on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2015. By applying discourse historical analysis (DHA), she showed the importance of public figures' 'self-mediatisation' for understanding the interactional media-politics relationship (Esser, 2014). While media and political systems belong to two distinct institutional spheres, politicians need to present their political views and actions on the media stage, to ensure public support - that grounds legitimacy in democratic politics-. In addition to this, Colombo (2018) points out the growing role of new media, as part of a networked hybrid public sphere (Chadwick, 2013; Krzyzanowski, & Wodak, 2013), where political messages are personalised, and

other media discourses are re-contextualised in “a reciprocal loop” (Esser, 2014). However, despite affirming it, Colombo fails to fully examine the reciprocal shaping of texts in practice, analysing Matteo Renzi’s speech in isolation, rather than in its interaction with other messages.

#### **1.3.4.1 Concluding remarks on media and politics**

Despite providing interesting insights on the construction of refugees’ identities, these contributions raise some ethical, epistemological and theoretical concerns, assuming that media influence public opinion by shaping private psychological attitudes. This approach regards readers (or viewers) solely as passive recipients of contents conveyed by media, ignoring the role of social media in empowering individuals as well. Thus, the process of meaning construction is conceptualised as a mono-directional trajectory, moving exclusively from the traditional media to the audience, never in the reverse.

Furthermore, these contributions focus on the construction of refugees in individual domains, for instance in the media, in works of arts, within legal procedures, alternatively dealing with narratives produced by refugees themselves in specific contexts. As a result, it is implicit that discourses and narratives exist in isolation and that can be analysed outside their “narrative environment” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). The relationships that discourses may have with “other shaping stories” (Shuman, 2012) available in the larger cultural, historical, and social contexts are, at times, theorised, but not implemented in the analysis performed. Sometimes, texts are de-contextualised, as “example of discourse” (Leudar et al., 2008), violating the very established principle in linguistic, that

meanings of words and actions are indexical to their settings. Furthermore, conducting a one-directional analysis of the representations of refugees in a specific domain of social life risks to be limiting. These kinds of investigation do not provide any information about the ways in which asylum seekers/refugees employ these representations, and negotiate their identities. Though I will not be addressing this point in my research, it is important to stress that it may raise an ethical issue, as little space is given to refugees' voice as to how they wish to construct their own identities. While much narrative and discursive oriented research on forced migrants focuses on "how others speak and write about refugees" (Leudar et al., 2008), this approach disempowers refugees and compromise the findings of academic research on the hostility toward forced migrants. As noted by Leudar et al. (2008), when "the uptake of hostility by its target so to speak" (p.189) is not included in the investigation, the investigation is incomplete.

### **1.3.6 Interactional approaches**

With the aim of overcoming these drawbacks, a variety of new analytic strategies have recently been developed in the field of narrative enquiry. These strategies move beyond the analysis of the *whats* of a story (Riessman2008, Gubrium & Holstein, 2011), namely the content, theme and structure of personal accounts, without excluding it,. The primary interest of these approaches, however, is not just to move to the *hows* of an account, i.e. its assemblage, rather to the interplay between the *whats* and the *hows* of narrative production, and its environments (Gubrium & Holstein, 2011). This perspective stresses the interplay between narratives in different



social contexts and the importance of tracing the social life of stories as they, and storytelling, are regarded, at the same time, as conditioned by circumstances, but also as ways of shaping them. In the field of the refugee studies, Amy Shuman (2011) offers an example of this analytic strategy, by acknowledging the role played by social interaction in the unfolding of refugee personal accounts. Intertextuality is, also, at the core of the analytic framework developed by Leudar et al., (2008) that adopts the concept of dialogical network (Leudar,1995; Leudar, 1998; Leudar & Nekvapil,1998; Nekvapil & Leudar, 1998) to study the effects of hostility on refugees' biographical narratives and psychological adjustment. I will deal with these theories in the next two paragraphs.

#### **1.3.5.1 Shuman's interactionally oriented narrative approach**

By analysing refugee's narratives interactionally, Shuman (2011) extends her analysis to include the study of the ways in which participants in a storytelling session manage the relationships among each other, with the events described, with the people involved in the narrative, and with the wider world. Shuman observes that, when adopting an interactional perspective, the concept of narrative should be understood as a cultural resource for negotiating meanings, not solely on a local scale, but, also, in larger cultural, historical, and social contexts. Interaction should imply a not only a relationship between tellers and listeners, but also include other relationships, beyond the narrative event. In order develop a methodology which reflects this concept of narrative, Shuman points out that, in addition to face-to face conversations, other interactions should be considered as affecting refugees' accounts narratives, such as telephone conversations, legal affidavit, other written communication. Furthermore, by referring to the concept of intertextuality, she

explains the ways in which political reports, or reports from N.G.O, and press releases might work dialogically with the narrative/s of refugees, positioning them intertextually within a wider historical or political discourse, legitimating refugees' claims or, conversely, contributing to their delegitimization. When these "other shaping stories" (Shuman, 2012, p.140) that have succeeded in becoming prominent in the consciousness of an entire society, enter in a dialogue with those told by migrants, they contribute to reshape the life of refugees.

### **1.3.5.2 Concluding remarks on Shuman's narrative approach**

One of the strengths of Shuman's interactional approach is its opening up the opportunity to understand the process by which some narratives are valued and become part the cultural and linguistic resources of a community, while others are contested and devalued, demonstrating the social dynamics that render the formers 'available narratives'. These narratives work as familiar scripts, often embedded in awareness and familiarity through the media in a community repertoire of stories. These stories, nevertheless, can also be rejected by individuals as not not reflecting their lived experiences. Further, Shuman's approach sheds light on the ways in which, in narrative, the interactions the concepts of *entitlement*, *ownership*, *positionality* and *tellability* are moulded and negotiated among speakers. This approach provides a picture of the ways in which narratives are valued or delegitimised, while providing valuable descriptions of a course of events. Shuman, as many other narrative analysts, remains on a descriptive level, addressing the reasons for the occurrence of these dynamics, but neglecting to deal with their causes. This limitation reflects a typically traditional narrative analysis, targeted to address the "how" question. However, there

is a growing range of new approaches, integrating narrative and discourse analysis with other methods (Glynos, J., et al., 2009). In this research, discourse analysis will be integrated with analytical psychology, in an attempt to add an explanatory level, in addition to the descriptive one.

### 1.3.5.2 Leudar's Dialogical Networks

At the base of Leudar's et al.'s (2008) work lies the hypothesis, of the existence of an interactional and dialogical connection, in addition to thematic, among refugees'/asylum seekers' biographical narratives, media discourse and people everyday conversations. This hypothesis is addressed his in a research project carried out in three steps consisting of a series of interviews with asylum seekers and refugees on their experience of fleeing their countries, moving to, and living in UK; a series of interviews with their neighbours: an analysis of range of representations of refugees published in British newspapers in the week preceding the interviews. The scholars focused on the mutual connection among those diverse types of data and discourses that are, usually, studied independently, adopting the concept of *dialogical network*. A dialogical network is defined as "communications distributed in mass media, accessible through it and mediated by it" (Nekvapil & Leudar, 2004, p.?). The assumptions underpinning this concept are that different kinds of text, as newspaper articles, TV broadcasts and everyday conversations, that are traditionally studied separately, can be analysed together as a network, focusing on their mutual connections. Furthermore, from the scholars' viewpoint, texts are interactively connected, and not solely linked thematically. Thus, where the unit of the analysis coincides with the network, each individual data should be considered as

collaborative “turn” in a developing dialogical network. The texts forming a dialogical network may, directly, influence other interactions, as they become argumentative resources in everyday conversations. In this perspective, individual participants’ verbal actions should be viewed as “local, situationally, conditioned acts” (p. 61).

Dialogical networks are characterised by thematic cohesion, obtained through commonalities of expressions, or through the reuse of argumentative structures. However, they are cemented by similar sequential structures to those adopted in face-to-face conversations, with the difference that some slot in the sequence can be filled in by several simultaneous contributions. Often, several actors react to a sequence, for example individuals speakers, discussing a theme in the media, are frequently involved in “two conversation at the same time – with those present and with those absent” (Leudar, 2008, p. 63). All information communicated via dialogical network and distributed through mass media, is conveyed at different times and places. Furthermore, one premise of the concept of dialogical network lies in the idea that descriptions - like other acts of speech - are performatives (Austin, 1962). Far from simply describing events in an emerging network, newspapers create the network. With regard to the complexity of dialogical networks, Leudar et al. (2008) claim this depends on the topicality of the problem under discussion, for “the more socially serious it seems, the more participants join the network and, as a result, the more dialogical events are involved in the emerging network” (p. 63), thus, the more a dialogical event is relevant, the more it is interactionally productive.

### **Concluding remarks on Leudar’ s dialogical networks**

The concept of dialogical network clarifies the intertextual character of talk in public occasion. Furthermore, it opens to a review the idea of de-situated discourse, and the current concept of stereotype in cognitive social psychology. Contrary to the traditional cognitive theories, media communication, newspapers texts - and other form of texts produced by media - do not influence other interactions through shaping private psychological attitudes, rather they do it by becoming “resources in everyday conversations”. Media texts do not land in individuals minds, shaping they opinions and behaviours; rather they provide argumentative resources, in the form of texts adopted by social actors for their own purposes, in everyday conversations. Readers (or viewers) are not passive recipients of the content conveyed by media. (Texts, in facts, were used irrespectively of their original intent by participants, in a locally occasioned manner and to further their purposes. Questa frase qui e’ slegata da quella precedente) The idea of dialogical network not only enhances the agency of social actors, it also connects stereotypes, establishing a link not enough acknowledged in cognitive social psychology. Leudar et al. (2008) observe that, while representations of refugees analysed by them share a profound hostility, this hostility is expressed in a variety of discursive forms, influenced by the diverse settings. This observation offers a revised concept of discourse as, following Edwards and Potter (1992) “discourses are expressions generalized over disparate dialogical contexts they inevitably lose connections with those contexts. Furthermore, because generalisations are themselves occasioned, “discourses are better thought of, as occasioned collections of occasioned matters, rather than something that is objective and independent of the setting” (Leudar, 2008, p. 189). However, the first criticism to Leudar’s work consists in the presence of common tropes across time and space, next

to the differences in the representations of refugees and migrants (Threagold, 2009). Empathy and suspicion are established patterns in the representation of human mobility (Chouliaraki et al, 2017). Can the related concepts of dialogical network and of discourse be regarded as bound to specific settings responsible for the consistency and invariability of these findings? Also, can their cognitive model explain why, whatever the environment, forms of hostility persist toward migrants and why these negative stereotypes resist positive experiences? What does prevent people from integrating and transforming positive experiences with migrants and refugees into dialogical resources?

Another criticism relates to the emergence of a dialogical network. Leudar et al., (2004) explain that the elements and connections between texts in dialogical networks always reflect real social events. These networks are not “phantic communions” (2004, p. 263), rather they are motivated by historical, political and social issues. What provides cohesion to the network, and allows for its emergence is the presence of a problem to solve. The more socially relevant the problem, the more participation in the network will be ensured, and more events will be involved in the emerging network. Similarly, the more urgent is an issue, the more actors will join the network, and the more complex will become the network. However, this appears as a circulatory way of reasoning, failing to explain the reasons for a community to consider some events as urgent problems, while dismissing others. Leudar ‘s framework does not include an explanation layer for this topic.

## **Chapter**

## **II**

# **Narratives in Asylum Seeking**

## **2.0 Premise**

As mentioned in the first chapter, storytelling is at the very heart of the legal procedure for requesting international protection. However, while personal history is applicants' most important evidence at their disposal to obtain refugee *status*, their narratives are shaped by the wider societal discourses on asylum, affecting the perceptions and expectations of those involved in the RSDP (refugee status determination process). As Papadopoulos (2021) puts it, "the societal discourses constitute "the proper background out of which the various narratives emerge, outlining positions with regard to preferences and values and thus formulating stereotypes" (p.200). In this chapter I will closely analyse the background of those societal discourses on refugees, supporting and co-creating the *victim identity*, by focusing on the medical and legal spheres, as well as on that of media. Further, I will look at Renos Papadopoulos (2021)'s *Victim Diamond*, suggesting it might offer an effective framework to understand how stereotypes are produced, maintained and disseminated in the RSDP, by subtly replicating the oppression experienced by refugees in their country of origin (Amias, David; Hughes, Gillian; Barratt, Sara, 2014).

## **2.1 The media representation of refugees**

There are three main reasons why it is essential to address media representation of refugees. The first is press "social power" and its supposed influence on public opinion with regard to minorities. Van Dijk (1996) has defined social power as, "the control exercised by one group or organisation (or its members) over the actions and/or the minds of (the members of) another group, thus limiting the freedom of action of the others, or influencing their knowledge, attitudes or ideologies" (p.84).



As we will see, the power of the media in representing or shaping opinions is the object of a broad, ongoing, debate. (Duffy & Rowden, 2005).

Until recently, the influence of media on people's views was broadly regarded as limited. According to McCombs & Shaw (1972), while the media set the agenda of the issues they want people to be focusing on, they do not significantly influence their views on these issues. Similar conclusions have been reached by Curtice & Semetko (1994) with regard to election outcomes while Iyengar & Kinder (1987) suggest that media follow public opinion, rather than leading it.

Lately, however, the impact of media on people's opinions has been reconsidered. Lloyd (2004) and Hargreaves (2003) note how today news media "[...] have gone from being enfolded in or even marginalised by the more powerful institutions of the state...to enfolding them" (Lloyd & Hargreaves, 2004, in Duffy & Rowden, 2005, p.10). Milne (2005) claims that, while newspapers pick up existing concerns, they also contribute to shaping them, and concludes that the system linking news (media) and public opinion is a dynamic one. Lloyd (2004) and Hargreaves (2003) as well as Milne (2005), furthermore, introduce the idea that politics lost power and agency which is rather exercised by media now, Lloyd (2004) and Hargreaves (2003) point out that media's covering of specific themes and shaping of the narrative/s influence both, politics and public opinion. Further, Milne (2005) observes that, the electorate's dissatisfaction with the party system means political activism is no longer exercised in the conventional political arena. Rather, political engagement is reshaped by the conjunction of media power and popular protest.

While assuming that one dimensional cause and effect models, running in uniform directions, are not sufficient to understand the relationship between media, the political agenda and the policy process –this process being considerably more complex, dynamic and interactive – Gavin (2010), Milne and John Lloyd and Hargreaves’ findings are consistent with those found in recent studies on refugees. I already mentioned the concept of ‘mediatization of politics’ (Krzyzanowski et al., 2018) which refers to the increasing dependence of politics on media and on social/online media. The expression ‘mediatization of politics’ implies a profound change of the political practices which are altered into “a process of mediated attention-seeking, rather than of political representation” (Krzyzanowski et al., 2018, p.6). Political discourse is becoming increasingly similar to a purposefully polyphonic narrative, rather than a single, unitary voice. The 2015 “refugee crisis” could not be fully understood outside of this theoretical framework.

It is worth mentioning the recent extensive use of social and online media by political parties at large. In fact, while it has been showed that the radical right – often excluded from traditional media – is able to gain political capital via online communication (Krzyzanowski & Ledin, 2017; Ruzza, 2009), mainstream political parties also resort to online media to promote their choices and present the solutions adopted as unavoidable. The new media have been perceived as the privileged channel to spur the emotional aspect of politic. As summed up by Krzyzanowski et al. (2018), “the mediation-driven “digital politic” (Vaccari, 2013) have become the main carrier of the spill over of exclusionary views across public spheres and political spectra. Digital politics has/have also become the gateway for the further spread of “anxious politics” (Albertson & Gadarian, 2015) by building mainly (if not solely) on fears, imaginaries,

and anxieties, and are able to influence not only the radical right, but also the entire continuum of both left- and right-wing European politics” (p.7). The role of online media is of particular relevance when analysing political activism and social movements. On the one hand, according to a post-Althusserian perspective, mainstream media are ideological apparatus dominated by state and capitalist interests, hence, structurally biased against social movements. Early evidence of hostility toward protest and social movements in mainstream media seems to confirm this stance (Cammaerts, 2012). On the other hand, however, “mediation opportunity structure” (Cammaerts, 2012) enables and closes down opportunities for resistance. For instance, through self-mediation, activists are able to develop counter narratives and frames, by archiving the evidence of protest, including photographs and films which can be posted online. In so doing, they become ‘epistemic communities’ (Lipschutz, 2005), as the permanent nature of these artifacts allows them to construct discourses and symbols that can be shared on a long-term basis, creating a collective memory of the protest, and potentially being able to influence other movements through what is called ‘movement spillover. In fact, market-based social networking sites, as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, have been appropriated by activists not only to disseminate counter-narratives, but also to organise and coordinate protests, and to keep track of police movements (Cammaerts, 2012).

While no definitive conclusion can be drawn with regard to the social power of the media, a set of empirical research seems to confirm that newspaper coverage of topics such as immigration, the NHS, fear of crime and rating of party leaders can, over time, have a significant direct influence on people’s views (Duffy and Rowden, 2005).

For our purpose is relevant to emphasise how, according to Duffy and Rowden (2005), there are compelling suggestions that newspapers have the greatest impact especially on race/immigration issues. With their words: “When we use statistical techniques to identify what the key drivers of opinions are from a range of demographic and behavioural variables (including political views), it is with this issue that newspaper readership come out most clearly as the best explanation of variations” (p.6). I would suggest that, by using a survey design, the direction of causality cannot be determined with certainty, therefore, it is not possible to determine if the reporting in papers affects the people’s views or if people select papers that reflect their views, instead. However, Duffy and Rowden (2005) state that, by looking at trends through 2004, they noted common patterns, including a surge in concern among newspapers’ readers in March/April, when the press maximum focus was on the possible increase in immigration, as a result of EU expansion. As a similar peak cannot be detected among non-readers, it is possible to suggest that media do have some general influence on public opinion.

Doubtlessly, by selecting, highlighting or rejecting content, and by deciding the amount of coverage to be provided, according to their editorial policy or agenda, newspapers do exert control on public opinion (Gordon and Rosenberg 1989, 4; Statham 2002, 395; Greenslade 2005, 3). Furthermore, newspapers’ online availability extends their influence on young people (aged 16-24), “who tend to prefer the Internet over newspapers and television as their source of news “(Coleman et al. 2002, 23-24). The relation between the press and its readers, as noted by Crawley and Sriskandarajah (2005), 3) is bidirectional and dynamic. In fact, “Individual newspapers have a vested financial interest in reporting on issues within their readers’ concerns, as well as reflecting their views and attitudes, as newspaper readers tend to

read those newspapers that are generally in accord with their own perceptions and approaches” (p3). As concluded by Gabrielatos & Parker (2008), newspapers provide an excellent source of data for the examination of the construction of refugees and asylum seekers’ identities due to “The reciprocity of influence between readers and newspapers, and, more importantly, the power of newspapers over the selection, extent, frequency, and nature of their reporting, coupled with their availability for corpus compilation [...]” (p.,9).

The impact of media should not be ignored, particularly in relation to the general theoretical framework adopted in this work. This can be defined as a discourse analysis rooted in the tradition of post-structuralism. As mentioned, post-structuralist-oriented scholars have stressed that discourses produce subjects, and that the constructed meanings do not remain stable, but fluctuate incessantly. In other words, “the becoming of a subject through language and stories can never be a matter of fixed meaning” (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2012, p.29). This is where mediated language becomes of interest, because besides being “one of the most influential discursive forces and storytelling technologies by which we orientate ourselves in the world” (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2012, p.29), it promotes the constant change of meaning. Media language promotes “endless intertextualities” (Silverstone, 1993, p.13 in Livholts & Tamboukou, 2012, p.28), as it involves connecting different times and spaces, and the movement of meaning across different contexts, through different multiples devices:

“Mediation involves the movement of meaning from one context to another, from one discourse to another, from one event to another. It involves the constant transformation of meaning, both large scale and small, significant and insignificant as media texts and texts about media circulate in writing, in speech and audio-visual

forms, and as we, individually and collectively, directly and indirectly contribute to their production...Mediates meanings circulate in primary and secondary texts, through endless intertextualities, in parody and pastiche, in constant reply, an in the interminable discourses, both off-screen and on-screen, in which we as producers and consumers act and interact, urgently seeking to make sense of the world...(Silverstone, 1993, p.13)

The term mediation itself, according to Livholts & Tamboukou (2012) aptly describes the relationship between meaning and movement, the creation of meaning, indeed “can be understood as a movement that connects, locates and changes social life” (p.28). The complexity of mediation raises questions regarding who detain the power and the agency of producing stories\_(see Shuman, 2012) but also bring into focus issues related to the “level of interaction, interconnection and the influence of genre convention” (p.29). In fact, both news and fictionalised media use genre to construct meaning (Wright, 2002). Genre has an impact also on refugees’ narratives. Shuman (2012) demonstrated that in many speech occasions migrants construct their speeches combining different genres as written affidavit, interviews, list and filled-in blanks, conversation over the phone

An additional reason to address media’s growing interest toward refugees, resulting from the intensification of the migration flow to Europe over the last five years, is the considerable boost this has given to academic research<sup>13</sup>. The cause for the vast academic literature produced to date is only partially justified by the relevance of the

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<sup>13</sup> A brief, and by no means exhaustive, overview of studies on the media construction of the “refugee crisis” includes: Krzyzanowski, 2018; Sicurella, F. G. 2018; Vollmer et. al., .2017; Triandafyllidou 2018; Colombo M., 2018; Rheindorf M., et. al., 2018; Greussing E., & Boomgaarden H., G. 2017; Jakob-Moritz Eberl et al 2018; Krzyzanowski M., 2017; Wilmott A., C., 2017; Walker et.al., 2016; Heidenreich et.al., 2018; Vincze et.al 2020; Crawley et.al, 2017; Chouliaraki et.al., 2017; Esses et al., 2013.

matter, dynamics internal to academia provide another reason for this. Research, in fact, depends on funding which, in turn, tends to follow crisis (Threadgold 2009). This vicious circle between crisis, media representation, and academic research might reinforce the deep-rooted, though unreliable view that both, migration and the problems related to its representation by media are recent issues. However, far from being new, concerns related to media reporting of “migration emergency”, as well as to the “media-driven panics migration” (Threadgold 2009) have been the focus of academics and journalists for a long time (Krzyzanowski, 2009). By broadening our perspective, and moving away from the recent crisis for a moment, two, apparently, opposed trends are identifiable in the literature on media coverage of migration.

On the one hand, by progressively shifting the focus from traditional content analytical approaches to discourse analysis methods, linking texts structures to the socio-political context (van Dijk 2000), media discourses are analysed more and more *in-situ*, highlighting the relevance of the settings in which they are performed. Leudar (2008) points out that, while sharing a profound hostility, as well as common tropes across time and spaces, the discourses representing refugees in media, also, show a certain degree of diversity, explained by need to respond to the political and social issues relevant in a particular moment, in a determined context. Media discourses no longer analysed in isolation, but as part of dialogical networks which include different kind of events, as newspaper articles, television and radio broadcasts, social media content among others. At macro level, it has been noted that, while all European countries’ media discourses share common interpretative frames to explain the refugee emergency, the approach of individual nations to staging political debates as (re-) produced in media differed, as these were nationally contextualised in relation to a number of factors such as: the positioning of each country as a frontline or final

destination, past experiences of seeking or offering refuge and hosting migrants (or lack thereof), current challenges, including Euro-scepticism, above all, the relevance of domestic politics, upcoming national or regional elections, and the political positioning of those who speak at left or right and the ways right-wing populist and radical-right parties manipulated this situation (Triandafyllidou 2018, Wodak, Heidenreich, Lind, Eberl, Boomgaarden, 2019). Gabrielatos & Parker (2008) have pointed out that, despite the link between actual events as natural disasters, and terrorist attacks, and press attention to RASIM (Refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, migrants), two of the ‘spikes’ in press coverage co-occurred with political events in the United Kingdom: The Asylum Bill (March-April 2004) and the UK general elections (March-May 2005). In these periods the construction of RASIM was functional to negative criticism of government policies.

An interactive and context-related discursive approach to narratives on refugees does not prevent highlighting hostility themes toward refugees. It, also, raises the following issues: the link between the mediatisation and the politicisation of the refugee crisis, demonstrating that politics, media and public opinion should not be analysed as fields in their own right, rather, the research focus should address; the role of media in dehumanising refugees and the issue of responsibility; the relationship between media and public as not unidirectional, but bidirectional, as mentioned above (Gabrielatos & Parker, 2008).

Alongside the differences, on the other hand, the consistency and invariability of themes and forms are stressed. Threagold (2009) notes that researchers’ findings are very similar across times, spaces, and print and television media. Chouliaraki et al, (2017) has pointed out that, far from being exclusive to the recent crisis, a combination of empathy with suspicion “is an established pattern” (p.1163) in the



representation of human mobility. Philo et.al, (2013) has detected a long-term trend in media to “scapegoat, ‘stereotype’ and ‘criminalise’ migrant groups” (p.), while frames invoking “floods”, “invasion”, “criminality” and government loss of control are recurrent templates to organise news about migration. Krzyzanowski et.al (2018) stress that the media-based and mediated political discourses on the Refugee Crisis, frequently did not shape “new” ways of perceiving and interpreting migration and otherness. Rather, “these often rested on both national and cross-national re-contextualization of historical patterns of talking about “the other” as well as on the national discursive tradition of highly politicized exclusionary thinking” (p.3).

In the next paragraph, I will be examining some of the dominant tropes shaping the refugee imagery across time and space and then review the literature on the mediatization of the recent crisis in Europe, with particular reference to Italy. The aim is to analyse how the hostility theme have been moulded in the context of the European crisis and which issues have been identified as relevant.

### **2.1.1 Dehumanising refugees**

Dehumanisation involves the exclusion of the human element in those perceived as “Others” and represents “the ultimate form of intolerance of ‘otherness’” (Essen et al., 2013 p.522). A number of studies link the role of dehumanisation of individuals, or groups of individuals, with a feeling of uncertainty.

This feeling, motivated by the arrival of unknown migrants, can lead individuals to develop a sort of group-centrism, generating intolerance of otherness and “out-group derogation” (Essen et al. 2013, p.521). Hier & Greenberg (2002) link dehumanisation

to the collective feeling of uncertainty about citizenship and national identity caused by globalisation and the rise of neo-liberalism. In this context, manufacturing a crisis on refugee policy and immigration would reduce levels of anxiety, by providing the illusion that an effective solution to the problem has been identified. As noted by Essen et.al (2013), while in Western countries immigration policies and the treatment of migrants and refugees are contentious issues, raising many questions among the public, only scarce information is provided by governments to answer these questions. The resulting lack of clarity on how to understand and manage migration can be exploited to serve diverse ideological gains. With Essen's words, "the media and political elites may take advantage of this uncertainty to create a crisis mentality in which immigrants and refugees are portrayed as 'enemies at the gate'" (p. 519). Dehumanisation, then, is instrumental in can lower the level of uncertainty regarding how to see and manage migration, particularly for individuals who wants to maintain a privileged position and justify exclusion policies. Dehumanisation ensures the maintenance of the status quo for, "By perceiving immigrants and refugees as not completely part of the human in-group, one can more easily believe that they deserve negative outcomes and that perceptions of the national in-group do not need to shift to accommodate their inclusion. In this way, threat is reduced, and the status quo is maintained (see also Esses et al., 2008).

Though explanations on the reasons for promoting the dehumanisation of migrants and refugees may differ, the role of media is clearly pivotal. The rhetorical strategies used to deny "full humanness" (Essen et.al.2013, p. 522) to refugees are numerous and varied. In this paragraph, I will be focusing on the most common discursive dehumanising strategies, recurrent tropes and figures of speech employed, across time and space, to represent migrants and refugees, as recently reframed in Italy with

regard to the Diciotti Case. I will avoid making a clear distinction between refugees and migrants, as it is widely acknowledged that the media representation of migrants is largely negative (van Dijk, 2000). In addition to this, as the extensive academic literature on media and ethnic minorities shows, **confusion and conflation of definitions** (refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, immigrants) are some of the most frequently detected strategies adopted to delegitimise refugees and new-comers in general (Gabrielatos & Baker 2009, Crawley & Skleparis 2018). Following their analysis of the discursive construction of RASIM (refugee, asylum seekers, immigrant, migrant) in the UK press between 1996 and 2005, Gabrielato & Baker (2008) have identified the overlapping uses of terms as refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants. They also have pointed out the tabloids' frequent use of negatively biased and nonsensical terms such as **'illegal refugees'** or **'bogus refugees'** as opposed to the term 'refugees' predominantly adopted by broadsheets. With regards to relevant articles published in the UK press between 2010 and 2012, Blinder & Allen (2016) have reached a similar conclusion.

Referring to the recent European 'migration crises' in 2015, Crawley & Skleparis (2018) have pointed out how the adoption of separate categories - 'migrant and refugee' - have served to differentiate between those on the move and those claiming their right to apply for asylum. These categories, besides showing "a disjuncture between conceptual and policy categories and the lived experiences of those on the move" (p.48), naturalise mechanism of exclusion and discrimination. Furthermore, by privileging 'refugees' over 'migrants, they "reinforce, rather than challenges, the dichotomy's faulty foundations" (p.48). Berry, Garcia-Blanco, & Moore (2016), and Vollmer & Karakayali (2018) have reached similar conclusions, pointing out how,

by employing the term migrants/immigrants, during the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, tabloids sought to delegitimise asylum seekers’ and refugees’ political and personal situation. The use of de-humanising metaphors has been highlighted by scholars from different countries, at different times and through a plethora of methodological approaches. Following the fall of the Berlin wall, coverage of migrants’ and refugees’ journeys has likened them to “**Invasions**” and “**Flood**” (McLaughlin, 1999) in the UK media (Philo and Beattie, 1999). Terms referring to natural disasters are frequently used to dehumanised migrants (Charteris-Black, 2006; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Gardikiotis, 2003; Ruhrmann, 2002) in particular, ‘water themed’ metaphors (El Refaie, 2001). In 1999, when four boats of asylum-seekers from China reached the coast of British Columbia, Canada, immigration was equated to an invasion or a flooding of the country (Mahtani and Mountz, 2002). In spite of the small number of people involved, the media framed this arrival as a crisis, describing the asylum seekers as bogus, as carriers of threatening diseases, and as **potential terrorists**.

The attitude to dehumanising migrants, by presenting them as beastly - like creatures reflects a long tradition in Western thinking, drawing which on biological determinism, and on what has been called “The Great Chain of Being” (Lovejoy 1936 in Santa Ana 1999, p.2001). Media representation of migrants frequently uses this trope. Goodman (2007), for instance, observed that breeding metaphors were employed by public opinion to frame refugee families, with the scope of dehumanising them and undermining their legitimacy, following councils’ decision not to implement Section nine of the 2004 Asylum and Immigration Act, which allows children to be separated from their failed asylum seeker parents. **Immigrants as Animals** was, also, uncovered as the dominant metaphor during the 1994 public debate and campaign in California, over an anti-immigrant referendum (Santa Ana,

1999)<sup>i</sup>, re-contextualising the influent tradition of defining migrants with beast-like terms in Western thinking. The dominant animal metaphor is also reinforced by a set of secondary metaphors including “**Immigrants are Debased People; Weeds; Commodities**” (p.199). When the metaphor of the nation as body prevailed, immigrants stood metonymically for a **Disease** affecting the US or a **Burden** of the body, while, connected to the metaphor of the nations as a house, immigrants are portrayed as “dirt, to be swept out” (p.200), or as a **Dangerous water or Army**. The dichotomy **Us and Them** have been identified as a widespread discursive strategy used to justify restrictive measures against asylum seekers<sup>14</sup>. Lynn and Lea (2003), combining a bottom up and top-down discursive approach, investigated the construction of identity and otherness in everyday talks. They stress that everyday talks is where the “elite discourses” sediment and are internalized as truths and facts” (p.428), through complex social processes among which the media. The way in which the other and the self are differentiated posits and contrasts asylum seekers with members of the host society (British) and other groups. RASIM are dehumanised when they are discursively constructed as in **issue** “as a part of the struggle for political hegemony” (Gabrielato & Baker, 2009, p.). **Border** control and judicial treatment of illegal immigrants have been at the forefront of political, media, and institutional discourse (Colombo, 2018). According to Reindorf & Wodak (2018) the **Border** is discursively constructed in mediatised political discourse, as intimately linked to national identities and the national body. Perceived as “external” to the nation/national body, borders “are often articulated with a “loss of identity” or the threat thereof leading to appeals to “protect”. (p. 17).

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<sup>14</sup> See : Lynn and Lea 2003; 2005 Mehan 1997; van den Berg et al. 2003; Van der Valk 2003; van Dijk 1997; Verkuyten 2001, 2003, 2005, Goodman 2007

### 2.1.2 The mediatization of the “refugee crisis” in Europe

As countless variables affect the relationship between media and public opinion, these can be addressed from several different perspectives. In order to understand such phenomena as the growth of the anti-migration parties and the shifts in immigration policies that have characterised the recent history of European Union, it is important to identify the key factors informing the relation between media and the European citizen’s perceptions, attitudes and even behaviours. While continuities and discontinuities, similarities and differences are retraceable in the media discourses, it is important to hold together these two discourse trends in order to avoid oversimplifying a complex picture. Having looked at the recurring themes in the media representation of migrants identified by academic research, I will now focus on the specific context of the 2015 “refugee crises” as told by European media.

Despite some differences, mainly relating to the specific migrant group the discourse focuses on, several common patterns can be detected in the representation of migrant which is generally negative and conflict centred (Eberl et. al., 2018). In political news coverage, ‘immigration and integration’ are the third most negative topics in 16 Western democracies (Esser, Engesser, Matthes, & Berganza, 2017).

As mentioned in the first chapter, all the European countries seem to share a similar story line of events, including the massive shipwreck occurred off of Lampedusa in April 2015; the discovery of a truck on an Austrian motorway on August 2015 with the decomposing body of 71 people; the death of a young Syrian Kurdish boy, Aylan Kurdi, his brother and their mother, in the attempt to cross from Turkey to Greece; the closure of the Hungarian border in September 2015, and the debate over the

potential exclusion of Greece from Schengen. These events marked significant turning points and corresponding “discursive shifts” that can be isolated, and connected to policy developments like the Operation Sophia implemented by the European Council, or the imposition of emergency relocation quotas decided by European Commission, just to mention a few.

After conducting a meta-analysis of the research findings produced by scholars based in different European countries, Triandafyllidou (2018) identifies two competing interpretive frames to discuss the emergency in media and political speeches: the moralisation frame and the threat frame. The first one, though contextualised through different rhetorical strategies in each individual country, can be, overall, described as follows:

- The responsibility of the flows is put on the conflicts in the countries of origin.
- People on move are seen as victim deprived of agency.
- Asylum seekers are depersonalised (it is the flow that moves, not single individuals). They are personalised only when they have to present their tragic plight.
- Blame is cast on the human smugglers
- Little blame is placed on European politics and its indecisiveness.

The second frame, that of threat, is presented as:

- Flows are like a natural disaster: they are unpredictable, unmanageable, uncontrollable

- They involve health risks (diseases and the inability of health services to cope)
- Adoption of the strategy of personification: “Us”- the natives, the European- versus “Them”- the migrants, the newcomers.

Triandafyllidou notes an emerging third frame that of rationalisation, reconciling the moralisation and the threat frames. The rhetoric of rationality and efficiency in managing the flows of migrants is used to reconcile the unlimited solidarity with the limited capacity of welcoming migrants. This discursive position is adopted regardless of the left versus right political positioning of leaders, and of the status of country either as final destination or transit country.

In each European country, political leaders have appropriate specific events considered relevant according to criteria as their geographical and political proximity or the way they resonate with underlying national themes and historical legacy. This introduces us to the idea of the close intertwine between mediatization and the politicization of the “refugee crisis”, namely an interactive link between factual events and their coverage and de-/re-construction through media and political discourse (Triandafyllidou, 2018)

### **2.1.3 The media representation of migrants in Italy**

The sociological literature on migration has identified a close link between Italian media, politics and migration. Italy became a country of immigration only in the early 1980s and during the 1990s, when there was a substantial increase in the number of migrants entering in the country (Calavita2004; Pugliese2006; Bonifazi2007;



Einaudi2007), as a consequence most of research is focused from this decade onward (i.e. Geddes, 2008). As in many European countries, also in Italy migration has been described as a ‘threat’. Images of ‘massive invasion’ by a besieging army of ‘clandestine’, ‘irregular’, ‘illegal’ or ‘undocumented’ migrants have been at the core of political, media and institutional discourses. In public debates, parties from the rights and from the extreme right have presented migration as a problem, defining “the term of the debate in populist slogan” (Colombo, 2018, p. 163). Ter Wal (1996, 2000) shows how the MP from Alleanza Nazionale (AN) Maurizio Gasparri addressed the ‘problem of illegal immigration’, by fostering fears of crime and economic and security implications. During the 1994–5 government, MPs of both the MSI-AN (Movimento Sociale Italiano – Alleanza Nazionale) and the separatist Lega Nord (Northern League) parties advocated policies for immigration control that would intensify the fight against illegal immigrants” (Ter Wal, 2000, p. 39). Quassoli (2013) pointed out as, from the late 1990s, terms like ‘clandestino’ or ‘irregular migrant’ have become the pillars of an ideology encompassing a set of political position on the management of immigration, even reshaping everyday institutional policing activities.

Geddes (2008) analyses the immigration discourse during the 2001–06 centre-right government led by Silvio Berlusconi and FI, his party, noting how the stigmatising of immigrants as destructive of social order, in advance of the 2001 general election, was instrumental to the centre-right’s commitment to toughen action on immigration and their focus on law and order.

Colombo (2018) adds strength to the view that the Italian public debate on migration has been dominated by the “politics of fear” (Wodak, 2015) and securitarian discourses promoted by the extreme-right and populist parties, with the 2014–2015

“refugee crisis” creating “some major discursive shifts in the centre and centre-left political and media discourses” (Krzyzanowski, 2013 (p.163). To identify these shifts and further the understanding of how refugee crises have been represented in the political and media discourses, Colombo approaches the discourses on the 2014 – 2015 ‘crises’ in the framework of Discourse Historical Analysis (DHA) and in the light of the two interrelated concepts of ‘internal security field’ (Bigo, 2000) and ‘domopolitics’ (Walters, 2004). ‘Internal security field’ refers to the idea that there is a security continuum organised on transitional basis, stretching from terrorism to regulation of asylum rights. Within this continuum, asylum and migration issues become matters of “security”, rather than of human rights or citizenship questions. The term ‘Domopolitics’ refers to “the government of the state (but, crucially, other political spaces as well) as *home*” (Walters, 2004, p. 241 in Colombo, 2018 p. 166). By evoking elements as intimacy, family, and a sense of natural belonging associated to a specific concept of home, domopolitics rationalise a series of security measures intended to exclude those who are not from ‘*our place*’. Colombo has shown how both, securitarian and humanitarian discourses contribute to support the logic of domopolitics by promoting images of a natural order of states and people, eroding refugees’ rights.

### **2.2.0 Medicalising the political: the ‘refugee trauma’ discourse**

In this paragraph I will be focusing on the medical narratives on refugees and, in particular, on the ‘*refugee trauma discourse*’. I will address a series of questions,

including: how are refugees' human suffering and distress conceptualised in the realm of mental health? How do physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health professionals approach forced migrants' discomfort and hardship?; how do their theoretical models affect the support they offer to them?

Fassin and Rechtman noted that trauma has become the main "category of intelligibility" (Fassin & Rechtman, 2007, p. XI) employed to understand the refugee experience. As pointed out by Papadopoulos (2007) despite the fact that being a refugee is, without doubts, a political and legal reality, rather than a psychological condition, forced migrants are predominantly viewed in terms of trauma theories. In fact, though most evidence suggests that only a minority of individuals will be psychologically affected by the disrupting experiences they have endured (Summerfield 1999b; Loizos, 2003), the widespread and prevalent belief that all refugees are traumatised as a result of their adversities, persist. The "fallacy of the inevitable trauma" (Loizos, 2003), namely the idea that all those who have faced adverse circumstances "are suffering from a 'wound which will not heal' and need specialist support" (p. 44), is so widespread to render *being traumatized* the obvious "natural" condition experienced by refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and other displaced individuals. It is not my intention to deny that the exposure to disrupting predicaments might cause psychological consequences, even severe ones. The literature abounds with dramatic testimonies of mothers and fathers having witnessed their children massacred, or of gang rapes perpetrated against women, and of men reduced in a state of slavery. When considering cases like these, it is worth keeping in mind both, the question posed by Loizos (2003) "What could self-healing, social consolation or, indeed, therapy offer in the face of such losses?" (p.44), and Garland's

carefully evaluated statement that “people cannot be expected to ‘get over’ such profound damage” (Garland 1998 in Loizos, 2003, p.44).

However, it crucial to stress that, assuming that all refugees will be forever hindered by the ordeals they went through presents many conceptual, ethical, and even therapeutic weaknesses. I shall begin with the latter.

### 2.2.1 The construction of victimised identities

By assuming that the mere fact that the status of refugee implies being traumatised, the societal discourse on trauma supports the construction of *victimised identities*.

Papadopoulos (2021) explains this refers to the process according to which *victimised persons*, who have experienced adverse situations, without being involved in causing them, adopt the role and the position of ‘the victim’, beyond the context of the victimising event. As defined by Papadopoulos (2021) “[...] victim identity refers to when a *person become a victim*, i.e., thinks, feels, acts and interact as a victim at all time even beyond the original victimising context” (p.172). However, by portraying refugees as vulnerable, helpless and passive, the victim stereotype “constructs the image of the victims a as ‘objects’ rather than ‘subjects’ (p.188), disempowering them and hindering any process of recovery or positive development. It appears to be a clear connection between the narrative construction of the ‘refugee trauma’ and a potential re-traumatisation of involuntary displaced individuals (Papadopoulos, 1997, 1998, 2000a, 2001, 2021).

The consequences of imposing victimised identities on refugees will become clear when looking at the role of identity within a constructionist paradigm. As suggested

by Dubosc (2011), in psychology, that sort of substantiality, attributed to the Self by more “realistic” visions, has been questioned by different approaches that converge precisely within a broader constructivist paradigm. Many of them assume that human psychology has a narrative structure (Bruner, 1986; Dubosc, 2011;). Though experience cannot be communicated entirely in any language nor, even more, captured through any disciplinary or cultural system, it can be a “plot” in a human narrative, attempting to *interpret* the experience in a given *context* (Dubosc, 2011, p.86). It follows that, all experiences, even the traumatic one, evade a single interpretation, though they can be looked from different angles, and through the theoretical frameworks of different disciplines, including investigating traumatic experiences as neurophysiologic alterations, or looking at the qualitative changes of the experiences. Alternatively, positive resources can be activated, not only by individuals but also, at collective level, by groups. As observed by Dubosch (2011) in the face of trauma “I can also consider the repercussions of traumatic events in the narratives of a community or a society and focus on the dynamics of activating resilience, new resources, historical and political awareness” (p.86). If we assume, as narrative psychology does, that human beings attribute meanings to the events they experience, and that both, individual and social lives are formed by constructing and sharing these meanings, then we must agree with Loizos when he remarks on refugees’ disrupting experience, that “people have capacities to put such experiences into a framework of meaning in their attempts to move forward in life [...]” (p.44). It follows that the assumption that trauma might be the most appropriate lens through which to look at forced migrants needs to be questioned.

Narrowing the range of interpretations that an individual or a community can assign to a painful event is not only conceptually reductive, but has crucial consequences on the individuals' well-being, as trauma discourse neglects people's capacity of self-healing (Papadopoulos, 2007, 2021; Loizos, 2003). Being exposed to devastating events can indeed provoke a wide spectrum of responses, including positive ones such as resilience and adversity-activated development. These are not sufficiently addressed, due to "the tyrannical nature of the 'refugee trauma' discourse" (Papadopoulos, 2001, p.1). By suggesting the idea that trauma is the only possible outcome of having gone through painful experiences, the "tyranny of the trauma discourse" (p.1) relegates individual capacities and abilities to the background, and influences the support offered to refugees, shaping the kind of therapeutic services made available to them, and limiting their access.

In conclusion, while the discourse on refugee trauma presents a pathologised image of asylum, being a refugee is not a traumatic condition in itself. As Loizos (2003) summarises: "flight from danger does not in itself traumatize. It is additional experiences suffering violence and/or witnessing violence - which do the lasting damage. If there is room for doubt, it is better to keep an open mind than to assume 'trauma'" (p.45). The refugee trauma discourse stifles refugees' identities within the narrow boundaries of pathology, neglecting individual creative responses to distress. The hegemonic power of the trauma discourse has many causes. One is the reductive epistemology on which it relies. By oversimplifying refugees' predicament in the stereotype of the victim, it renders self-evident and understandable - despite in a distorted way - a concept that is actually elusive. As discussed in the introduction of this work, refugee can be thought as a floating signifier due to its ontological fragility. However, when dealing with uncertainty and the feelings of anxiety that this causes,

people will still try to assign meaning to people and events because “as human beings we cannot live without any comprehension”(Papadopoulos, 2021, p.17)

It crucial, then, to proceed to an epistemological reconstitution of the societal discourse on refugee trauma, to analyse its assumptions and consequences, and to answer to the following questions: how is refugee human suffering and distress conceptualised in the realm of mental health; how do physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health professionals, approach forced migrants’ discomfort and hardship? Why do they conceptualise it almost only in terms of trauma? How do their theoretical models affect the kind of support provided? These issues will be discussed in the following pages.

### **2.2.2 A wrong epistemology**

There are many factors that can, potentially, shape, positively or negatively, the experience of refugees, including the resources available to them to plan their flight and relocation in the new country, the conditions in which the choice to escape has matured, the extent to which they have been able to maintain control over their choices, the amount of violence they have witnessed or experienced, the social network on which refugees have been able to rely on. In the refugees’ tales, these elements do differ, as the ordeals experienced by each forced migrant is unique. However, the refugee trauma discourse does not take into account any of these variables, viewing the events that characterise forced migration not in the specific context of individual experience, but as traumatic per se.

Papadopoulos has greatly contributed to the understanding of the societal discourse on trauma, by highlighting that the *refugee trauma discourse* is grounded on a wrong causal-reductive epistemology, oversimplifying the relationship between external

events and intrapsychic consequences (Papadopoulos, 2001). In his view, the refugee trauma discourse is “a linear concept which implies a clear causal-reductive relationship between external events and intrapsychic consequences” (Papadopoulos, 2001, p.2), where events are considered traumatising in themselves, while both, the subjective experience and the individual response to events are denied. This simplistic connection between the events and psychological experience ignores all systemic complexities, including the relational nature of the events’ impact among family, community and ethnic group members, and the effects of the wider societal discourses, influencing the meaning, emphasis and quality of events and experiences. Furthermore, as Papadopoulos observes, this linear model of trauma facilitates the construction of victim identity, and the activation, at a psychological level, of the drama triangle, by neglecting many aspects of the refugee experience. In the following paragraphs, I will address the range of factors which promoting the emergence of the refugee trauma discourse.

#### **2.2.2.1 The trivialisation of the word trauma**

The power acquired by the societal narrative of trauma relies, on the one hand on the simple equivalence –clear, though incorrect epistemologically - that being exposed to adversity leads to be, unavoidably, traumatised (Papadopoulos, 2003). On the other hand, this power is determined by trivialising the word “trauma”. It has been argued that, since being appropriated by journalists, politicians, policies makers, social commentators, and demagogues, this term has lost its specific psychological meaning, to indicate any disrupting, hurting, distressing, unsettling experience (Papadopoulos, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2001; Withuis, 2001). Trauma is, currently, an



umbrella term for diverse events, including cases of robbery, bad news, loss of loved ones, natural disasters, cars accidents, and has become synonymous of painful experiences (Papadopoulos 2003; 2001). As its meaning continues to expand “even to the point of becoming trivialized” (Withuis, 2001, p. 6), Summerfield concludes that “people suffer of a sort of inability of accepting sorrow and normal human suffering as something that is a part of life” (Summerfield cited in Withuis2001. P.16). Pupavac (2004) refers to contemporary Western societies as permeated by a culture of vulnerability, where social issues are conceptualised in therapeutic terms. She points out that the rise in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) diagnosis is a result of turning socio-historical matters into medico-psychiatric concerns. The tendency to diagnose the war-affected populations as traumatised, and in need of therapeutic intervention, then, is the result of aid workers’ projections of their personal sense of vulnerability onto refugees, as the lack of clear moral and ideological frameworks in Western societies, is cause for the former of pain and loss of meaning.

### **2.3 Legal discourses on refugees**

Law is, commonly, believed to be the realm of ‘objective-facts’ and logic reasoning. However, though we are generally unaware of this, legal tales are, in fact, largely affected by narrative. The prevailing view in the practice of law is that specific cases are decided by a value – neutral process of rule selection and application. Law is conceived as a set of discoverable principles which need to be identified and applied to facts. While ‘facts’ are approached as philosophically un-problematic, as being

‘out there’, lawyers and judges are concerned with identifying them and determining which general principles they call into play (Good p 31). This *rule-based-reasoning* approach explains why, during the legal process, the events that have led to the litigations are often stripped of specific details, leading to the loss of the contexts within which the events occurred. As highlighted by Good (2006), with regard the asylum procedure the court of appeal’s written decisions on the applicant's life story up to the point of his asylum request, and any previous litigation in the lower courts are succinctly set out.

Such concision has not just the purpose managing the size of the written judgment, but it is seen as necessary “to facilitate the application of the decisive legal principle” (Conley and O’ Barr 1990b: 11), to allow the rule-based reasoning to apply the perceived correct procedure. However, recent studies question the idea that the legal process is, in practice, really, about applying abstract principles to concrete cases. In addition to this, also the consequences of undertaking a rule-based reasoning when dealing with people coming from different cultural backgrounds are matter of debate.

### **2.3.1 The iconic victim**

As Paskey (2014) argues, the dichotomy between ‘narrative reasoning’ and ‘rule-based reasoning’ is false, as in reality, narrative reasoning plays an even a greater role in the implementation of law. This is not, solely, because law stories are “narrative in structure, adversarial in spirit, rhetorical in aim [...]” (Bruner, 2002, p.43), making them excellent tools of persuasion (Kenneth D. Chestek, 2012; Paskey, 2014), but also because stories are embedded in the structure of law itself, so much that “In a

very literal sense, no one can make laws or practice law without telling stories” (Paskey, 2014, p. 54).

To argue this point, Paskey first distinguishes between ‘a story’- something that happened to someone or something, with outcomes or consequences that serve the storyteller's purpose – and ‘a stock story’ - a conventional story, stripped of all but essential details. The key elements of the story - events, entities, and consequences - are stated generically, and reduced to stock structures (a stock character, for instance) or to an idealized cognitive model. A stock story is a recurring story template or "story skeleton", a 'model for similar stories that will be told with differing events, entities, and details. In this sense, a stock story is an archetype, but not necessarily one drawing upon classical mythology.

Paskey (2014) argues that every governing legal rule<sup>15</sup> possesses the underlying structure of a stock story, and that rule-based reasoning is a form of narrative reasoning, “in which the story in a given set of facts is compared to the stock -story embedded in the rule” (p.52).<sup>16</sup> In his own words: “The essential traits of a governing rule directly correspond to the essential traits of a stock story. Each consists of elements, including entities, things, events, or circumstances. The elements are expressed in general terms and have a logical relationship and in each case, there is a plot: for governing rules, a legal result; for stock stories, a significant consequence” (p. 52). Therefore, a story is embedded in the rule’s structure, and the rule can only be satisfied by telling a story.

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<sup>15</sup> Even though, Paskey speaks about governing rules, he specifies that this can be applied to all form of legal rules

The consequences of neglecting the narrative aspect of the law on asylum have been explored by Jessica Mayo (2012) who, in her study of the "victim narrative" in U.S. asylum law, focused on the intersection between narratives manufactured by lawyers, the law, and the lived experience/s of asylum applicants. She pointed out that, while the experience of refugees is, often, "an impossibly complex tangle of different points of view, stream-of-consciousness reactions, and limited perception" (p.1496), lawyers need to shape these, often, fragmented and non-chronological stories "into a coherent narrative that fits the framework" of asylum law.

They work on the *narrative discourse*, as defined by Paskey, namely, on *how* a story is presented, but this task is complicated by the stock story embedded in asylum law's governing rules, requiring a victim, thus shaping refugees' identities into victimised roles. Paskey (2014) summed up this point as follows: "asylum law requires a 'certain homogenization of claims' and appears to reward an "iconic" victim. Thus, the law pressures applicants to adopt a victim identity, "an extremely limiting' role that 'leaves no room for any other features of a person's identity" (Mayo, 2012, p. 1505, in Paskey, p.81), including the applicant's courage and hopes for the future. It also requires the applicant taking an adversarial stance toward their country of origin. All of this, and more, was embedded in asylum's governing rules-in asylum law's stock story- "through the process of selection and description"(p.81).

Even when a lawyer succeeds in crafting a truth available story for the legal system, starting from that "imperfect and fluid work of memory, organization and meaning" (Eastmond, 2007, p. 260 in Mayo, 2012, p. 1496), where lays the truth of their client's narrative, a number of issues can still hinder the applicant's path toward obtaining of the status of refugee. Indeed, as Mayo (2012) points out, narrative truth does not

always guarantee a believable story, for the incredible power of storytelling relies on coherence. However, the measure of coherence is in the conformity of the story to the listener's perception of the world. It is true that immigration judges are not average listeners, as they are trained and experienced in assessing the stories of individuals leaving behind contexts where violence is widespread, and are familiar with the conditions of those countries that have been fled. However, if it is the perceived coherence and conformity of a story that renders it believable, rather than truth, it is reasonable to question whether training is sufficient to render judges immune to the *power of narrative*.

### **2.3.2 The cultural obstacles of the asylum application process**

Shuman & Bohmer (2004) analysed how the cultural assumptions, underlying the Refugee Conventions, and held by the officials, may facilitate the rejection of claims. They suggested that, while applicants must recount their own traumatic stories, focusing on their individual sufferings, in order to obtain asylum, this might prove politically challenging for many of them, as it frames their predicaments in terms of personal traumas, rather than the consequence of political oppression. The adoption of a political narrative to describe traumatic events is the result of a long process of elaboration that not all the people are able to access. Furthermore, each culture constructs its own discourse to talk about grief, displacement, persecution, victimisation, courage and fear, terms can only be translated to a certain degree, since they are embodied “cultural constructions further differentiated by local understanding of age, gender and other identity markers” (Shuman & Bohmer, 2004

p.402). This implies that the key terms adopted in the Refugee Convention, including fear, persecution, but also, religion, race and ethnic group will be understood differently by applicants from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds.

However, if the meanings of the key concepts of the Refugee law are linked to a specific context, and its terms (fear, persecution, religion, race) can only properly be understood in the light of a rule-oriented legal process (Good, 2006) – based on the application of abstract and context-free principles to the applicant’s story, can generate a countless number of misunderstandings, undermining the fairness of the RSD.

Asylum claimants and public officers adopt “radically different discourse systems” (Shuman & Bohmer, 2004., p. 396) and are oblivious to these differences. Shuman & Bohmer (2004), focused on seven areas where these different narratives tend to conflict: time, relevance, chronology and coherence, emotional presentation, corroboration, date details and evidence, plausibility.

An example of this is provided by the emphasis placed on linear narratives by immigration officials, even if narrative accounts of persecution and trauma are often, not surprisingly, confused. When an ordinary life is disrupted, the cause is often unclear, thus individuals search for meaning in what is happening to them, and look for a culturally pertinent convention for representing a new dimension of experience, and the new sense of the self that spurs from it.

The importance placed on recorded time, as a measure of credibility, reflects another cultural assumption, which is usually unclear to applicants. In fact, while immigration officials regard the recollection of details as evidence of accuracy, asylum seekers are, often, unfamiliar with the use of calendar dates.

Lack of plausibility is one of the most common reasons adopted to refuse an application, though, frequently, the cause rests in the judges' inadequate expertise to accept some events as credible. According to a qualitative research led in Italy by the NGO "Senzaconfine", the main difficulties arising from the hearings are: the interpreters' poor training, the officials' inadequate understanding of certain countries of origin's institutional, juridical, social and cultural structures/elements, the absence of relevant and up to date information on the country of origin, the tendency to use the interview solely to check the applicants' credibility, rather than listening to their stories with an open mind.

### **2.3.3 The "Culture of disbelief"**

Our findings can assist the development of a situated and constructionist perspective on the so-called climate of disbelief. The term "culture of disbelief" is employed by many refugee organisations to denounce the widespread assumption, among RSD, that asylum seekers lie, in order to take advantage of the welfare system of Western rich countries.

In UK, a substantial body of data on the impact of the "culture of disbelief" on the assessment of the applicant's credibility, and on the unfair refusal of many grounded asylum claims, has been collected. As suggested by the word "culture", the propensity to disbelieve the asylum seekers' testimonies would seem to permeate the UK Home Office decision-making at large (Souter 2010, p.1). Amnesty International (2004), Asylum Aid (1999), Trueman (2009), and Arnold and Ginn (2008) have identified a consistent pattern of arbitrary, inconsistent decision-making and bias in the reasons

for refusal letters (RFRLs) issued to unsuccessful applicants by the UK Border Agency (UKBA),

While the operational effectiveness of the concept of culture of disbelief has been questioned as too monolithic or all-pervasive (Souter 2010), more complex and constructionist –oriented model have been proposed. Souter (2010) introduces the term of “culture of denial”, as a wider concept able to reflect more accurately the deep flaws within the RSD. Applying Cohen’s theoretical framework on denial to the asylum, he distinguishes among; a *literal denial* when the Home Office simply responds to asylum seekers stating that their story is untrue; an *interpretative denial* in those cases where the sequence of events reported by the applicant is accepted, but its significance is refused; an *implicatory denial* when, though both, the facts and their relevance are acknowledged, the authorities disavow the resulting moral and legal implications. He adds, to this theoretical model, four distinct epistemological approaches to denial: *epistemic, ontological, existential and performative*,<sup>17</sup> suggesting that they can appear as a combination. In Souter’s more complex and dynamic model, disbelief is not a static feeling, but is *performed* in different dimensions of the RSD. According to Souter’s model, different forms of denial can be either justified or unjustified to varying degrees. For instances, performative denial, namely, the refusal of refugee status, “may be appropriate when faced with a groundless claim, while denial is inappropriate in RSD if it prevents due

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<sup>17</sup> One example of epistemic denial is when Home Office refuse to take into account certain facts or pieces of information; ontological when authorities deny the identity of an asylum seekers portraying him as an economic migrant; existential when the very existence of asylum seekers is denied and performative when government refuses to perform certain acts as granting asylum. As we suggested, forms of denials can appear combined as in the case of the *interpretative ontological* denial that occurs when, by interpreting the behaviour and the characteristic of an asylum seekers, his identity is denied, by claiming he is somebody else.



consideration of a claim or lead unjust refusal” (Souter 2011, p. 53). This approach does not provide an effective way to identify when the denial is the result of a bias toward the applicant, and when it is founded.

Anderson, et., al (2014) propose a model that regards the “culture of disbelief” not just as a pre-existing entity, but as a cultural object socially constructed, one of the possible outcomes of the interaction of multiple realities and subjectivities within the RSD. Following the observation of the ethnographic participants in the court hearings, and drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts of “habitus”, “field” and “capital”, researchers have defined the courtroom as a site of cultural production, where actors, with different forms and levels of capital, struggle over the symbolic capital of asylum. The culture of disbelief manifests itself when and if certain elements concur to reduce the space for the examination of a claim. Among the factors responsible for reducing the space for substantiation of claims, and foster a suspicious environment are poor linguistic and cultural translation, the judges’ limited cultural references the Hopo and the solicitors’ distortion and misinterpretation of the appellants’ testimonies, the Home Office representatives’ preference for objective evidences when providing oral evidence, the bureaucratic nature of the hearings - represented by the role assumed by the bundles as “a document of authority and site of symbolic capital” (p.11) – reducing appellants to cases in a long series of cases, rather than a individuals with unique stories.

## **2.4 Interactional matrix**

Having noted how the fluctuation of the portrayal of refugees between the stereotypical figures of the 'refugee-victim' and the 'refugee as a threat', prevents alternative representations, I will be showing, how the discourses generated within different domains tend to overlap and shape each other, despite being informed by different epistemologies. I will also second that stereotypes can be understood as resulting from a new form of bio-power, in Foucauldian terms, based on the *paradigm of separation* (Pacioni, 2016) and that Papadopoulos's Victim Diamond provides an effective framework to address two aspects left unresolved by the sole discursive approach: the role played by emotions in building stereotyped identities, and the role enacted by social actors who, in the Foucauldian framework, disappear within the discourses shaping them.

With regard to the medical field, the refugee trauma discourse is the outcome of a wrong epistemology, establishing a simplified relationship between external events and intrapsychic consequences (Papadopoulos, 2001). The *traumatized refugee* persona is produced within the wider Western bio-medical causal epistemology, whose reductionism has been widely criticised. At the centre of the bio-medical paradigm lies the model of the body as a complex machine - separated from the socio-cultural context and the individual's network of relationships - and of the mind, as universal and ahistorical. By interpreting diseases as merely organic accidents, the bio-medical model denies the role of social and power relations in affecting the bodies of the patients, and in shaping the very forms of the disease. (Pizza, 2005; Quaranta, 2006). As a consequence, the patient's experience is delegitimised, in favour of that of the 'expert'.

Trauma, therefore, from a medical definition becomes a legal and political category. Refugees status is granted primarily in relation to the applicant's ability to produce a justified traumatic story (Beneduce, 2003, Fassin & d'Halluin, Good A., 2007; Klingeber 2009, Rahola, Sbriccoli & Perugini 2012; 2005, Vacchiano, 2005). The common practice of requesting the sole certification of previously endured traumas, rather than the inclusion of the potential ones, tightly binds the legal decision to the medical opinion. The contradictions of this medicalisation of asylum have been widely debated. Fassin & d'Halluin (2007) point out that, while the medical certification provides the only chance to demonstrate the violence endured, it contributes to the reification and desubjectification of migrants. When the applicant's tortured body is separated from their personal experience, the words of the 'experts' tend to acquire more credibility than those of asylum seekers. As a consequence of this, Klingeberg (2009) notes that the body becomes the last place of political legitimacy, reducing the individual to "bare life" (Agamben, 2005). Fassin (2004) acknowledges that, the placing of greater importance on the traumatised body rather than on the threatened one, creates a shift in the perception of the right to life, from the political to the humanitarian - sphere. Malkki adopts the term "clinical humanitarianism" to describe the tendency to dismiss the authority and dignity of the political subject.<sup>18</sup> When the biomedical parameters assume greater importance than those relating to the logic of political, social, religious, affiliation, the geopolitical connotation of the violence is mystified (Rahola, 2005). Objectifying the migrant in the category of victim, through the certification of the trauma, transforms the status

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<sup>18</sup> "Wounds are accepted as objective evidences, as the most reliable sources of knowledge with respect to the words of persons on whose bodies the wounds themselves are" (Malkki, 2002, p, 351, in Klingeberg, Sarah, 2009, p.161).

of the applicant from political subject to patient and victim, a category eminently moral and then impolitic (Rahola, 2005).

Thus, the *traumatized refugee* transfers from the medical field to the legal one, where the narratives of vulnerability determine not only who will obtain protection, but also who will be able to access the dedicated services for refugees, imposing hierarchies of rights and entitlements, and creating two categories of refugees, those “who are deemed to deserve protection and those who do not” (Smith & Waite 2019, p. 2290). However, vulnerability itself is not an objective status, devoid of culture and history. The condition of vulnerability is perceived differently over times, across cultures and, even “within cultures”, depending on the diverse social narratives. However, as Plumar (1995) points out “as societies changes stories change” (p. 79) and again, “different moments have highlighted different stories” (1995, p. 4, in Smith & Waite, 2019, p. 2290).

#### **2.4.1 The paradigm of separation**

I suggest that the *iconic victim* of the refugee law, the *traumatized refugee* of medical nosology are both the outcome of a technology of power, removing the individual from the history, the societal context, the culture, and the network of relationships, in which they are rooted. Pacioni (2016) identifies this in a new bio-politics of bodies, in force for several decades now based on the prevalence of *the paradigm of separation*, on that of *distinction*, and on the inversion of roles between *model* and *complexity*.

To explain how this new bio-power operates, Pacioni (2016) points out that the great ‘double characters’ of literature – Goethe’s *Faust*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, Dostoevsky’s *Idiot*, Stendhal’s *Julien Sorel* in *The Red and the Black* - show us that human beings’ disposition to be someone else, far from being an anomaly, is shared by all. Conversely, it is inhuman not to be able to recognise a plurality of identities in the one, to distinguish in oneself, different personalities that coexist, “[...] to separate, to settle forever in a single identity and discard the possibility of being other and with another” (p.21).

Despite this, a new governance of bodies, supported by neurogenetics and neurosciences aspire to the *reductio ad unum*, to single out a sort of essence of the human-being that shall be identified in the brain. The essence of life can and must be understood through a process, reducing life to minute elements as neurons. In order to develop these new *neuro-living beings* - controllable and manipulable - individuals must be *separated* from everything exceeding, or irreducible to, the neuro-genetic substratum. Any element surrounding the object - as its environment - becomes marginal. The irrelevance of the environment, namely “the others, social relationships, history, biographical events, or, in other words, the *political dimension of the human* (italics in the text)” (Pacioni, 2016, p. 29), becomes apparent when mental distress is treated just as a physiological problem internal to the brain. Supported by a *will to know*, to say it with Foucault’s words, that “considers knowledge only as cause and effect action-reaction mechanisms which exclude any element of *contest* (italics in the text)” (p.27)”, this new bio-power reverses the relationship between complexity and model. In neuroscience, for instance, the model is not instrumental to the understanding the operating of a complex system, but a

device to simplify complexity. The model reduces complexity until it disappears, model and system becoming the same.

If everything which differs from the model, I would say the *otherness with respect to the model* must be separated, rather than distinguished, the ‘other foreigner’ will become a prime target for bio-power. The *stranger*, in fact, undermines just every possible language of the *oneness* (Curi, 2010). According to Curi (2010), the stranger’s radical otherness connects us with the numinous dimension of the *mysteriosum tremendum et fascinans*, that is, that emotional state inspired by the things that scare *and* attract us at the same time, without it being possible to eliminate one of the two feelings in favour of the other. S/he is in fact, “threat and a gift, not one thing *or* the other indeed one thing *precisely because* is the other” (author's italics, p.12). While the reduction of what can be *distinguished* into what must be *separated* leads to the logic of one or the other, resulting in one at a time, the *stranger* supplants the reassuring logic of *aut –aut* (either-or) with a mode of reasoning based on *et-et* (both-and).

Curi (2010) suggests that this ambivalence is closely connected with the feeling of the *uncanny*, and linked to the upsetting perception of the constitutive duplicity of reality but, above all, of our psyche, where the life and death drives are not two antagonistic forces, but one the other side of the other, each containing its opposite. For Freud the *uncanny* - not surprisingly triggered by figures evoking form of doubling and subdivision of the ego - i.e. the shadow, the mirror image, the double - derives from the awareness of an irreducible duplicity, identifiable in the other with whom one comes into contact, but even more so in oneself. Truly disturbing the discovery that the ambivalence does not concern something external to us, belonging to another, but that it affects us. The stranger, therefore, because connects us with the double

outside of us, but even with the double inside us cannot avoid evoking double feelings: fear and attraction, familiarity and strangeness.

It is not by coincidence that, from a sociological perspective, Bauman defines the post - race other, the *stranger* as a friend and enemy at the same time. For strangers are not *unfamiliar* individuals, they break all dualisms: “they are neither us nor them” (Clarke, 2003, p.55). While between the ‘us’ and ‘them’, the ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’ clear boundaries, social, physical and psychological, persist, creating the illusion of order, the stranger causes confusion and anxiety by straddling the borders, by bringing the ‘outside’ ‘inside’ and “poisoning the comfort of order with the suspicion of chaos” (Clarke, 2003, p. 55).

#### **2.4.2 The Victim Diamond**

The bio-power, based on the paradigm of separation, shapes the discourses on asylum – that ‘background noise’ from which stereotypes originate, obscuring the individual (Dennis, 2008) – raising questions on the reasons for the broad appeal of this oversimplification and on what prevents people to move away from those identity positions. I suggest that Papadopoulos (2021)’s Victim Diamond provides a suitable framework to understand what determines the positioning of individuals within these discourses, restoring their agency to social actors – at least potentially – and conceptualising the role of emotions, role which seems to be assumed by the Foucauldian approach, but not fully acknowledged.

Papadopoulos (2021) utilises the concept of *epistemological cycle* to explain the process through which individuals and groups develop their initial understanding of an event, adopt a position with respect to it, and act accordingly. He hypothesises the existence of a cyclical flow between three moments:

**1.** Our initial perception of a phenomenon is affected by a number of factors we are not aware of : personal characteristics (personal history, educational background, intellectual and psychological unique features), demographic data (gender, race, age, ethnicity, class, disability, poverty), power positions, set systems of meanings, cultural and legal factors, interacting with aspects related to the wider historical and political context. This initial epistemological perspective defines our conceptualisation of the event, our assumptions and presuppositions. **2.** This first moment will shape our location, i.e. our positioning respect to the event we are dealing with, enabling us to make certain assumptions and exclude other considerations. **3.** These epistemological positions, in which the initial conceptualisation have positioned us, determine, in turn, our course of action , as they shape our perception of which options are viable, and which are not.



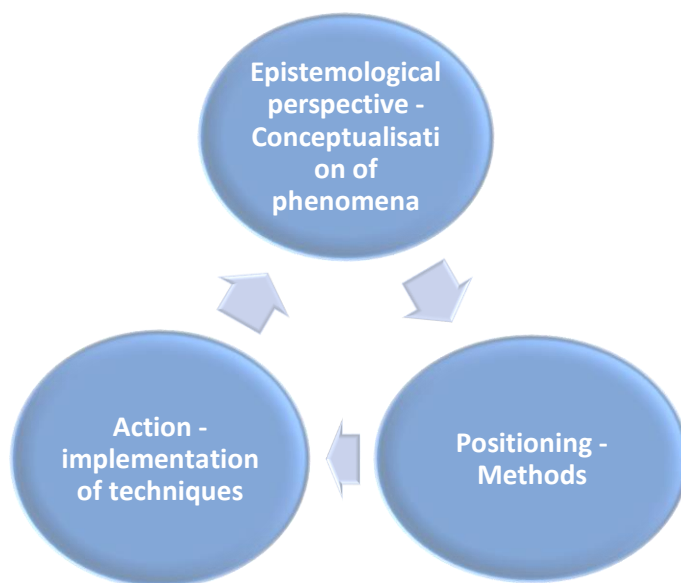


Fig.1- The epistemological cycle (Papadopoulos, 2021)

This process is cyclical and works beyond our conscious comprehension, as the actual experiences influencing our perceptions will, in turn, assist us when reviewing and refining our initial perceptions. However, when dealing with complex and emotional laden situation, we lose our ability to properly process phenomena and experiences and are prone to form hasty opinions. It is important – here – to stress that with *processing*, Papadopoulos does not refer to a mere cognitive function, but to a process involving the totality of one’s being, including the emotional reaction and one’s experience of oneself. Under the pressure of complex and emotional events/facts/issues, we tend to commit several epistemological mistakes, the most relevant to the purpose of this study being: 1. *Confusion between the events and the experience of events*: this is conducive to reaching the wrong conclusion - that all the people who have faced adversity are traumatised. 2. *Confusion between various overlapping discourses e.g legal, ethical, social, political, psychological, medical, spiritual, human rights*: the different discourses on asylum tend to overlap, merging

into each other, losing any form of differentiation in the process, and leading to two scenarios, either one amorphous and indistinguishable cluster of a monolithic stance, often of a polarised nature, or one prevailing discourse, removing the richness that diverse interpretations can bring to a multi-faced understanding of a given phenomenon” (p. 23). Referring to the second scenario described by Papadopoulos, I have addressed the “tyrannical nature of the ‘refugee trauma’ discourse” (Papadopoulos, 2001, p.1). 3 *Pathologising the survivors in order to condemn the perpetrators*: the confusion among moral and ethical, clinical and pathological, with socio-political and historical discourses has contributed to the construction of victimised identities, as the need to condemn individuals and groups responsible of political oppression and crimes against humanity leads us to “offer, as a ‘proof’, the fact that people may have been traumatised by these despicable actions” and to pathologise them. 4 *Confusion between being a ‘victim of circumstance’ and developing a ‘victim identity’*: the confusion between a ‘victimised person’, namely an individual who experienced adverse situations, without being involved in causing them, and the development of victim identity, i.e. the adoption of the role and the position of ‘the victim’, beyond the context of the victimising event. As defined by Papadopoulos (2021) “[...] victim identity refers to when a *person become a victim*, i.e., thinks, feels, acts and interact as a victim at all time, even beyond the original victimising context” (p. 172).

Expanding on Karpman’s work, Papadopoulos states that, whenever various forms of victimisations take place, individuals tend to play a pre-set and stereotypical roles, reflecting the central dynamics of those relationship – which is that of victimisation. These roles are the Victim, the Persecutor, and the Rescuer. Later he added a fourth character: the audience. The drama, in fact, unfolds in front of other people, who

witness the events, supporting, approving or disapproving the main actors. They are the spectators of the victim drama, who can assist silently or engage in different ways, even, as pointed out by Papadopoulos, through social media. As explained by Papadopoulos (2021), the best way to conceptualise the stereotypical interactions the Victim Diamond is “to accept them as being of an *archetypal nature*” (p.192). In extreme synthesis, Jung theory of archetypes can be illustrated as follow. Jung identified deep universally shared layers of the unconscious psyche, which he defined “collective unconscious”. These layers are believed to be transpersonal. Therefore, contents arising from the collective unconscious can never be directly experienced by individuals. Jung called these contents “archetypes” and defined them as abstract organizing structures. Although there is some debate around this topic, archetypes are supposed to be innate, hereditary dispositions to organise experience according to typical themes or patterns. Jung also made a crucial distinction between archetypes as such and archetypal images. *Archetypes as such* are empty forms, which can be filled with contents provided by the socio-cultural environment. *Archetypal images* (which do not consist only of visual contents, as the word “image” could suggest, but also of narratives), are instead shaped by the *Zeitgeist* - the spirit of the time. An archetypal image is, essentially, an unconscious content that has become conscious and, therefore, knowable. However, archetypal images are not identical to the unconscious contents that generate them. During the process of becoming conscious and being perceived by consciousness, the content is in fact altered by the “colour” of the individual consciousness, as well as by historical and social influences (Jung, 1959/1968; Waddell, 2006).

Archetypes have two poles and can therefore organise human experience around positive or negative patterns. When they manifest through archetypal images, for

instance in dreams, they can trigger numinous experiences. Jung took the notion of the “numinous” from Rudolf Otto, who had previously defined it as a “*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” (R. Otto, 1950), an experience that can evoke alternated states of dismay and rapture and is usually felt as transcendent and spiritual. It is precisely this fascination which explains why people are attracted to occupy one of the available positions within the Victim Triangle, identifying in one the stereotyped figures described. This point, the ‘dizzy nature’ of archetypes, will be further explained the chapter 3.

## **Chapter**

### **III**

# **Trauma**

### **3.0 Premise**

In the previous chapter, I dealt with narratives in asylum seeking, observing that the public sphere is permeated by streams of discourses that cluster around some themes. The prevalent ones are those which cluster around the motifs of ‘the Victim’ and ‘the Persecutor’, which are moulded in slightly different ways, according to the domain

analysed. Being highly polarised, these discourses offer an oversimplified representation of asylum.

I also highlighted that media castaways' representations are shaped by the stereotypes of *the traumatized victim* and of *the refugee as a threat*. At the level of the asylum policies, instead, the notion of vulnerability contributes to establish a hierarchy of *deserving refugees*, which constructs forced migrants either as passive beings in need of support, or as bogus and parasitical individuals. These representations have important repercussions on the fairness of the process for the DRS and on its political value. In the medical realm, following Papadopoulos (2001, 2002, 2007, 2021), I stressed that the societal discourse on trauma is based on the wrong epistemological premise that external events and intrapsychic consequences are connected by a cause-and-effect relationship. This reductive assumption facilitates, on one hand, the emergence of *victimized identities*, on the other, an increasing suspicion toward those who refuse to acquire the identity of "victim".

As noted, the different discourses on asylum (e.g., legal, medical, psychological, etc.) tend to merge, losing differentiation. According to Papadopoulos (2021), when discourses overlap, two scenarios are possible: "either they form one amorphous and indistinguishable cluster of a monolithic stance, often of a polarised nature, or one discourse over-dominates all the others, blotting out the richness of the diversity that they can bring to a multifaceted understanding of a given phenomenon" (p.23). In both cases, the result is the formation of confused and polarised positions.

Finally, in reference to the second scenario described by Papadopoulos, I addressed the so called "tyrannical nature of the 'refugee trauma' discourse" (Papadopoulos, 2001, p.1), noting the power of trauma narrative in re-conceptualizing all the discourses on asylum under its framework. Adopting psychologization, perceiving

survivors only in terms of their helplessness, is a form of reductionism particularly dangerous for IDPs. In this chapter, I will be showing that the wrong epistemology underlying the ‘refugee trauma’ is not exclusive of the discourses on IDPs only. Rather, the conjuring up of the victim and the persecutor’s figures finds its premises in the historical conceptualisation of trauma. Following a preliminary investigation on the very concept of trauma, I will argue that the most appropriate method to grasp those complexities is a *genealogic* approach, that get lost when social phenomena are psychologised. I will consider three historical moments which I regard as particularly relevant to understand the socio-political factors affecting the construction of trauma. Then, I will suggest that, if we approach trauma from a constructionist perspective – as a discourse rather than a diagnostic category- we still need to reintroduce the role of the *affect*. I will argue that narrative approaches to the social realm should be more sensitive to the dimension of the *affect*. This often-neglected dimension is responsible for the polarization opposing victims and persecutors and offers important insight to demonstrate how social actors comply to some discourses rather than others, often adopting apparently irrational stances. Then, I will claim that *affect* also plays a role in the scientific models developed to explain traumas. In fact, these models have been elaborated within highly emotional social and political circumstances. Therefore, they can present a kind of one-sidedness, focusing only on a single aspect of trauma (individual vs. collective, biological, or psychological vs. cultural). Finally, I will suggest that Jungian informed theories provide a sufficiently broad framework to contain the multidimensional aspects of trauma.

### **3.1 The concept of trauma: a preliminary investigation**

Even from a preliminary analysis, it is evident how trauma is a heterogeneous concept challenging any attempt to univocally define it. Depending on the theoretical approach and the socio-historical context, trauma has been located in the body, in the mind, in the individual psyche, in the collective one, in the culture, and in the discursive formations.

Furthermore, there is a lack of agreement with regards to the causes of the trauma. From time to time, highly diverse situations, individual and collective, have been defined “traumatizing”: wars, socio-political conflicts, car accidents, rapes, harassment, loss of loved ones - up to everyday episodes as “[..] the shock reaction of sports fans at an unexpected defeat of their favourite team” or “the people’s response to economic hardships” (Papadopoulos, 2021, p.206). Victimhood is still matter of debate. Victims are usually considered those who have experienced, first-hand, disruptive events. However, depending on the theoretical perspective adopted, this category can include those who have witnessed, watched through media, or listened to trauma experiences of others, a phenomenon called ‘secondary traumatization’.

So far, regarding trauma, it is evident that its boundaries are variable and uncertain. The ambiguous and multidimensional nature of trauma has been pointed out by scholars from different traditions (Esther Fischer-Homberger, 1999; Losi, 2020; Papadopoulos, 2021; Lukhurst 2008). Lukhurst (2008), for instance, observes:

[...] yet Trauma violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound. Trauma also appears to be worryingly transmissible: it leaks between mental and physical symptoms, between patients (as in the ‘contagions’ of hysteria or shell shock), between patients and doctors via the mysterious processes of transference or

suggestion, and between victims and their listeners or viewers who are commonly moved to forms of overwhelming sympathy, even to the extent of claiming secondary victimhood” (p. 3)

In a similar way, Esther Fischer-Homberger (1999) notes that:

“Trauma tends to exceed human understanding. It disrespects boundaries, interrupts all kinds of units and makes them blend, it disturbs bodily and psychic organisms and upsets social and historical organization. Some characteristics of the history of trauma have their origin in this situation. One of them is the gradual extension for instance of the notion of ‘trauma’ which makes the surgical ‘wound’ (Greek: trauma) evolve into a bio-psycho-social phenomenon”. (p.260)

Papadopoulos (2021) writes about its “unrestrained polysemy” (p.210), stressing that, despite the prevailing illusion that trauma is a term with an immediately intelligible and single meaning, it refers to a wide range of phenomena, covering disparate meanings. In fact, trauma is used to describe both, minimal or inconsequential form of discomfort as well as serious psychiatric conditions. The term trauma is also adopted indiscriminately to describe individual experiences, psychological states, and collective responses to adverse events, or wider socio-political events, which are not of psychiatric nature.

Papadopoulos, furthermore, stresses another element making the concept of trauma elusive: its multi-disciplinarity. Not only because many different disciplines have contributed to developing the concept of trauma, but also because the term has been adopted with generic and ambiguous meanings in a range of contexts.

1. Papadopoulos (2021) identified at least nine different uses of the term trauma: 1) *Colloquial use*, including the most trivial forms of discomfort to the most serious disorders. He argues that, even if those using the term do not offer a coherent definition of the term, trauma is still used in this ‘colloquial’ manner by journalists,



politicians, and even academics and professionals; 2) In *Psychoanalysis*, trauma is based on a complex theoretical framework whose core idea is the existence of the unconscious. In the psychoanalytic context, trauma refers to intrapsychic and pathological structures requiring professional treatment. As noted by Papadopoulos, psychoanalysis comprises a number of different ‘schools’ and orientation, each of them offering different understanding of trauma. Variations on the definition of trauma are detectable within each school, and even, within the theories of one specific author; 3) In *Psychiatry*, trauma is defined according to the diagnostic category of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), reported in the two main classification systems of mental disorders, International Classification of Disorders (ICD) and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). While they are based on empirical research, and appears very convincing, it should be noted how the criteria defining and diagnosing trauma change in every new version of these classification systems. As Papadopoulos points out, even though ICD and DSM seem to provide unambiguous specifications of trauma symptoms, there is still a heated debate on the aetiology and the symptomatology of trauma 4) In *Neuropsychology* trauma is defined by an alteration of the brain function. According to the relevant literature, PTSD is associated with attenuated neural connectivity of brain structures, which can be detected through Rs-fMRI [i.e. resting state functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging]. This would suggest that disruptive events would leave a scientifically detectable trace in the brain. Papadopoulos points out, however, that the changes of the brain functions, depend on the meanings individuals associate to the external stimuli rather than on events themselves. As Papadopoulos concludes (2021) “Therefore, the idea that we can detect the trauma in the brain needs to be understood in a nuanced way” (p.209);

5) In *Human and social sciences and the arts*- this category includes a broad range of disciplines as history, literary, studies, sociology, gender studies, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, etc, but there is not a shared definition of trauma. Rather, in each field there is an attempt to formulate new articulation(s) applicable to a particular context; 6) *Impact of exposure to adversity*: a broad category based on the belief that trauma is caused by exposure to various adversities; 7) *Specific types of 'trauma' situations*: in a sense, this is a subcategory of the previous one. This category is characterised by the attitude to define trauma according to the specific external type of adversity which is supposed to cause it. Then, as pointed out by Papadopoulos the list is endless: “disaster trauma”, ‘divorce trauma’, ‘war trauma’, ‘unemployment trauma’, ‘financial trauma’, ‘retirement trauma’, ‘bullying trauma’, ‘relocation trauma’, ‘austerity trauma’, ‘incest trauma’, ‘Brexit trauma’, ‘downsizing trauma’, ‘examinations trauma’, ‘empty nest trauma’, ‘climate trauma’, etc.” (p.209). There is not any homogenous way to conceptualise trauma; 8) *Collective forms of distress*: this is a distinct category of trauma describing wider collective groups’ response to various forms of adversity. In this category are phenomena termed societal trauma, cultural trauma, national trauma, community trauma, political trauma, post-colonial trauma. Papadopoulos warns that the use of the term trauma oscillates between literal and metaphorical, while individuals using the term are often unaware of this lack of distinction 9) In *medicine*: trauma refers to a physical, bodily wound.

From a perspective closer to cultural studies, Luckhurst (2008) has summed up the matter, arguing that in order to grasp the very reach the term has attained and its full resonance, one needs to be aware at least of:

“[...] the history of psychodynamic psychology in the late nineteenth century including, but far from exclusively, the work of Sigmund Freud, and then the progress of the law of tort regarding recovery of damages relating to the negligent infliction of ‘nervous shock’ since 1901, and then the role of military psychiatry and pension agencies across successive wars of the twentieth century, and then the place of trauma in deconstruction and post-structuralist philosophy since about 1990, and then sociological theories of trauma as ‘a socially mediated attribution’, a form of collective memorial practice that therefore rejects the ‘naturalistic fallacy’ of psychologists (Alexander 2004: 8), and then recent studies of the brain physiology of the locus coeruleus and the effects on memory and emotion of catecholamines like norepinephrine when under severe stress, and then, finally, the revolution in treatments of traumatic stress using a combination of drugs focused on serotonin and cognitive behavioural therapy. Given the specialization of knowledge and the sheer volume of discipline-specific scholarship, it is a severe stretch to acquire this range of expertise, with almost inevitable lapses of knowledge and understanding (p.4).

This leads Luckhurst to conclude with La Capra that, ‘No genre or discipline “owns” trauma as a problem or can provide definitive boundaries for it’ (La Capra 2001, p. 96 in Luckhurst, 2008, p. 4), rather, “Trauma is also always a breaching of disciplines” (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 4).

Given the multi-disciplinary and heterogeneous nature of this concept, Luckhurst (2008) suggests that resorting to Latour’s idea of “exemplary conceptual knot” (Latour 1987 p. 201, in Luckhurst, 2008, p.14), might be helpful to grasp it.

According to Latour, there are two assumptions in social sciences that need to be overcome. The first is the distinction between science and politics. The second is the idea that social meanings are formed through the interaction between subjects. For Latour, knowledge and practice form complex networks which also include non-human objects. Therefore, successful scientific statements are those establishing several links, through the network, even beyond their own disciplines, “looping through different knowledge, institutions, practices, social, political, cultural forums”

(Luckhurst, 2008, p 14). The success of a concept depends, thus, on “the number of points linked, the length and strength of the linkage” (Latour, 1987, p. 201, in Luckhurst, 2008, p. 14), and it is determined by its heterogeneity, rather than its purity.

In Latour’s language, trauma can be understood as an incredibly successful conceptual knot, whose pervasiveness can be explained with the impressive range of elements it binds together. The intertwining of these different elements allows the concept of trauma to travel to diverse places in the network of knowledge, assuming the features of “hybrid assemblages” (Latour, 2004), namely, ‘tangled objects’, *Imbroglios* messing up our fundamental categories of subject and object, human and non-human, societal and natural: “things that seem to emerge somewhere between the natural and the man-made and that tangle up questions of science, law, technology, capitalism, politics, medicine and risk” (Luckhurst, 2008, pp. 14-15). These objects have ‘no clear boundaries, no sharp separation, between their own hard kernel and their own environment’ (Latour 2004, p. 24, in Luckhurst, 2008, p. 15).

In a similar way, Papadopoulos (2021) notes that, it is not despite its inconsistencies and ambiguous meanings that the word trauma enjoys such a long-lasting success, but because of them. Its elastic and elusive nature makes trauma ‘highly adaptable’. With his words “[...] trauma has survived not despite its fuzziness and multi-signification, but precisely because of them” (p.211).

### **3.1.1 Deconstructing trauma**

It is necessary to expand our epistemological understanding of the term trauma. As mentioned, in fact, lay people, as well as many professionals, hold an implicit theory on trauma based on the model of the psychological wound caused, deterministically, by an external stressor to an individual (Papadopoulos, 2021). According to the “lay trauma theory” (Alexander J.C., 2012, p.7), traumas are naturally occurring events that have the power to shatter an individual’s sense of well-being. This power to shatter is thought as a quality of the events, namely, “[...] is thought to emerge from events themselves” (Alexander J.C., 2012, p.7). Being traumatised, in the lay perspective, is from the victim an “immediate and un-reflexive response” (Alexander J.C., 2012, pp.7-8). In short, trauma occurs when ‘a traumatizing event’ interacts with ‘human nature’. This idea of trauma neglects the role of personal resources, social networks and cultural context in mediating individuals’ relationships with pain and suffering and conceptualise ‘human nature’ as universalistic and a-historical.

There is a common belief that everybody knows what trauma is and that there is no need to question its meaning. Due to this assumption, this lay model is applied, unreflectively, to many different phenomena, regardless of the much epistemological incongruence it presents, among which four are the ones most relevant to this work:

1. This model neglects the interactive relationship and mutual shaping between individual mind and cultural and socio-politic context, focusing on an idea of the mind as ahistorical. However, as Coppi (2003) points out, relationships define humans, there is no humanisation without community: “*between individual identity and collective identity there is continuity, one does not exist without the other*” (p.134) (emphasis added, my translation). Mind is not detached from the environment in which it is immersed. The meaning of health and sickness are defined by culture.

2. We psychologise social facts by naively expanding a model focused on individual mind to socio-cultural phenomena. In fact, if the individual becomes the fundamental ontological phenomenon, then society is interpreted as a psychological fact. However, if we consider society, we need to acknowledge that, as noted by Schatzki (1996), “first [...] totality has an existence beyond that of its parts and a nature that transcends the properties of the amalgamation of these parts; and second, that its existence and nature specify properties of and/or meanings for its parts. These properties and meanings usually pertain to the ‘place’ the parts occupy in the whole. The existence, persistence and development of the whole are also typically thought to be governed by principles that apply to the whole *qua* whole, thereby derivatively specifying the operations of the parts” (p.2). Should we, in the face of a distressing socio-cultural and political event impacting a collective group, apply a model of trauma based on the theory of the ‘wounded mind’, we would lose all the complexities connected to the socio-political context in which a disrupting event occurs. These complexities include the actions of the media and institutional forces that will frame the event, the effects of these representations on the legal process, the social dynamics, where particular social groups have vested interest in supporting some representations rather than others.
3. Trauma is a ‘loose cannon’ (Papadopoulos, 2021, p. 211) in that, despite its loose connotation, it possesses an exceptional power to push activists, opinion makers, public opinion in supporting those believed to be the ‘victims’. With Papadopoulos’ (2021) words, trauma: “when it is coupled with images portraying traumatised persons or when it is part of narratives of harrowing experiences, it has the exceptional power to act as a most potent impetus for mobilising support

for the cause it is intended to promote” (p.211). This paradox, according to which trauma is so vague to be meaningless on one hand, and so powerful to compel people to act, influencing their fate for generations on the other is largely unacknowledged. In this context, it is pivotal to address the highly polarised implication of trauma and its potency.

4. To ask ourselves ‘what do we really mean when we talk about trauma?’ is essential not only on a theoretical level, as our answer can have important repercussions on our work with forced migrants. Whether Losi (2020) is right, or not, when he writes that the thought of "trauma" arises in the mind of the rescuer even before that of the rescued, we need to be fully aware of our theoretical schemes and of their limitations, to avoid imposing ethnocentric models of care to people from different cultural backgrounds.

However, while improving our knowledge of the assumptions and epistemological presumptions underling our idea on trauma is essential, the reviewing of today’s broad range of psychological and psychoanalytic theories would not be of much help. As claimed by Papadopoulos (2021), trauma, beyond psychology and psychiatry, “constitutes a *discourse* that permeates perceptions and conceptualization and bestows identities on people within wider socio-political context” (p.210).

### **3.1.2 A genealogical approach to trauma**

Seeing trauma as a ‘tangled object’, the result of a complex interweaving of elements, its essentialization in a psychiatric category is reductionist. Psychoanalysis and the evolution of psychiatry are only two of the many factors contributing to define the

concept of trauma, and reviewing the different medical and psychological theories would be limiting.

Rather than approaching it as a definite conceptual category, I will try to 'disentangle' it, identifying its constituent and creating the basis for discussing their epistemological assumptions. Denaturalising the concept of trauma requires addressing the problem of its genesis, focusing on the heterogeneity of the disciplines, and socio-political dynamics that contributed to its development (Lukhurts, 2008).

Aiming to it, I divided this chapter in two sections. In the first, I will focus on how the idea of trauma was born and conceptualized, at the end of the Nineteenth century, until the consolidation of the so-called *trauma paradigm* in the cultural landscape of the second half of the Twentieth century. I will look at trauma as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense, as 'historical event' (Catucci, 2000).

Consistent with Foucault's view, the historical analysis of trauma does not reveal any truth or expose us to a singular meaning, implying the possibility for trauma to have a positive content outside the discursive strategies that have defined it. Trauma should not be regarded as unitary concept, but as result of a series of discourses that shaped it within specific cultural contexts.

This approach finds its foundation in Foucault's beliefs that, while the conceptual structures organising our experience, in short "what we say, we do, we think" (Catucci, 2000, p. 6.), must be historicized, any idea of continuity and progress should be subtracted from the historical flux. As the historical process does not proceed linearly, but through epistemological ruptures, that cut the order of knowledge and involve, from time to time, new arrangements of cognitive paradigms (p.7), discontinuity is the proper criterion to investigate history.



Thus, rather than attempt a linear reconstruction, I will focus on some specific moments in which the complexity of the trauma concept clearly emerges, for example: the formulation of the diagnosis of the ‘spinal syndrome’, the ‘psychic trauma’ and the ‘Post Traumatic Stress Disorder’ (PTSD).

### 3.1.3 A reflective approach to trauma narratives

In the first section of this chapter, I will focus on those major shifts in discursive regimes, or ‘epistemes’ as Foucault (1970) called them, that shaped trauma as an object of human understanding, modifying, from time to time, its epistemological configuration and determining *if* and *how* thinking of it and discussing it. As we shall see, to different organizations of knowledge corresponded different understandings of trauma.

However, while, a *genealogic* approach can contribute to the description of the discursive practices and the power dynamics connected to them in different periods and contexts, it fails to fully clarify the reasons why some discourses are more successful than others, or why people choose one specific discourse.

To better investigate this latter point, in the second section of this chapter I will be approaching the role of the affect in the trauma narratives. While, indeed, a *genealogic* approach can contribute to describe the discursive practices and the power dynamics connected to them in different periods and contexts, it shows limits when it comes to clarify why some discourses are more successful than others, why people choose one particular discourse among those available. While, so far, I have focused on the refugee trauma discourse as a cultural artefact, fostering the process of othering of refugees, promoting the subjective position of the victim and the persecutor in the

public domain, I, now suggest the need to add an additional explanatory and critical layer in order to understand the reasons and the process through which, people accept and reproduce these representations. As I hope to show the affect has a role in making this decision.

Foucault himself answered these questions pointing out that social actors, actually, are not even aware that alternative ways are possible. Starting from the assumption that language is not an instrument to express ideas, but “a source of thought in its own right” (Gutting, 2005, p.32) he focused on the notion of *constrain thought*, and on the conditions of possibility of our concepts and experience. For him, individual thinking is not free, rather, every mode of thinking, including *our* thinking, involves implicit rules, not even formulable by those following them, which constrain the range of thoughts (Gutting, 2005), making some ideas unthinkable.

As noted by Gutting (2005), rather than explaining subjectivity by social or economic factors, Foucault conceives it as devoid of conscience. Conscience understood in a psychological sense does not play a decisive role in the formation of the subject's thought or, at least, of those thoughts, ideas, beliefs, attitudes that shape individuals' identities. With Gutting's words Foucault project is to “offer an *internal* account of human thinking, without assuming a privileged status for the conscious content of that thought - without a privileged role for the thinker [...]” (2005, p. 35), a project whose key is the language as a structure independent of those whose use it. Subjectivity is not out of history, but the stage on which the individual subject enacts her story and much of the script is established independently from her thoughts and actions. Conscious thoughts, “what is consciously going on in the minds of scientists, philosophers et al. - are less important than the underlying structures that form the context for their thinking” (p.33). This issue can be reformulated, with Miller (2011),

as follow: Foucauldian approach and discourse theory in general “comes to the boundary of the subject and the issue of agency” (p.189). However, this agency should be “understood as the capacity to act” (Miller, 2011, p.189), rather than “the self-originating transcendental subject of phenomenology” (Barker & Galanski, 2001, p.17, in Miller, 2011, p.189). For Foucault, there is no inner subject but only the subject produced by history. However, as noted by Miller (2011) while Foucault focused on the ways in which discourses affect and create individuals who exist within them, he did not provide us “with an understanding of how and why particular discourses are ‘taken up’ by some subjects and not by others or how a subject produced through disciplinary discursive practices can resist power” (Barker & Galanski, 2001, p.31 in Miller, p.191). Foucault leaves some issues unresolved as “the question of agency (the capacity to resist subject positions created by discourse) and choice (the choice to act) [...]” (p.191).

I suggest that, to understand how subjects are attached to discourse in general, and to narratives on trauma, in particular, we need to consider first the role of the affect. Second, a psychoanalytic dimension could provide a suitable framework to investigate the emotional investment which ‘glue’ subjects to trauma narratives. Third, by approaching the construction of trauma discourse reflectively, through the lens of psychoanalysis, it will highlight how the figures of the victim and the perpetrator (this last can be declined in different ways, for instance, as simulator) accompany all the development of the scientific and medical theories on trauma. In other words, beyond being a cultural artefact fostering the othering of refugees, the refugee trauma discourse shifts slightly the perspective, providing a privileged place where the Other is, not only, constructed but, also, “phantasized”, that is, imagined and invested with affect. Fourth, I suggest that Jungian theory could provide an

effective framework to grasp the dynamics underpinning the conjuring up of the victim and the persecutor stereotypes, shaping subjectivity within trauma narratives. In fact, following Miller (2011) while “Discourse theory, travelling from a (post) structuralist position, comes to the boundary of the subject and the issue of the agency...”, “Jungian theory travelling from a phenomenological position, comes to the boundary of culture” (p. 189) complementing each other. Finally, I will be referring to those post-Jungians as Thomas Singer and, above all, Renos Papadopoulos who expands Jungian framework to be applied to the socio-political realm as the most suitable frameworks for keeping together individual and collective dimension, the role of the affect, a model that avoid the splitting between an idea of trauma as only individual or only collective.

### **3.2 Trauma, an all-encompassing theory**

The discourse on “the refugee trauma” is born and built in a cultural context in which the concept of trauma became not only pervasive, but a structuring element of both individual and collective identity in Western societies. As highlighted by a corpus of research, produced in the last thirty years (Seltzer 1997; Luckhurst 2008; D. Fassin & R. Rechtman 2009; Branchini 2013; Caruth; 1991a; 1991b, 1996a, 1996b; R. Leys 2000; Summerfield 1989; Papadopoulos 2021; Withius, 2001), trauma and the related diagnosis of PTSD are not just timeless psychiatric condition and diagnosis, but historical concepts, condensing social and political interests.

Researchers from different fields highlighted that, far from being confined in the medical field, trauma has turned into a ‘cultural paradigm’. Trauma has become a crucial form of organization of thought and social life, or a *discourse*, in Foucault’s

terms, on the process of identity formation of modern and post-modern individual (Branchini, 2013). The modern subject has become inseparable from the categories of shock and trauma” (Seltzer, 1997, p.18), to the extent that the latter would be not understandable without the former.

However, it is not, just, the experience of the individual subject which is read through the prism of trauma. Through an epistemological shift on which we shall focus on later, the *traumatic identity* is assumed to be at the root of many national collective memorials, an assumption dense of social and political repercussions. A number of studies appeared to explore how more or less real shocking events experienced by a community are evoked to consolidate a group identity and make sense of contemporary socio-political problems. Examples of the topics dealt with in such works include: the possible influence of post-colonial trauma on British politics and culture since the 80s (Howe, 2003), the role played by the Vukovar’s massacre on the construction of Croatian national identity (Lindsey, 2004), the restored sense of community triggered by the terroristic attacks of the 11/9 in U.S.A (Kaplan 2005), the need for Germans to mourn in the traumatic context of the post-war Germany (Santner, 1990), and the injunction to remember in the narratives of Croatian nationalists as way to overpassing trauma and preserving society from repetition (Eyal, 2004).

The connection between trauma and collective identity does not seem to be, solely, a matter of re-enactment and re-shaping of past historical events. At times, the trauma paradigm, acts as a factor of social cohesion. Moments of trauma seem to foster a particular kind of community, which develops around tragic events (Lukhurt, 2008). While the process of modernisation has removed individuals from their social bounds and historical roots, fostering loneliness and irrational fears (Beck, 2007), trauma, as

a collective wound, provides the individual with what has been placed on the shoulders of the single subject. Kaplan (2005) seems to offer an example of this newfound sense of community when she describes the 9/11 attacks as an event able to make her feel a connection to strangers she had never experienced before. Among other depreciable consequences, the terrorist attacks spurred what Luckhurst defined the “real creation of new-public sphere communities” (p. 2) an idea, albeit read in a more positive key, shared by Butler (2004) when she says that grief “furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does it first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility” (p.22, in Luckhurst, 2008, p. 2).

But what makes the trauma paradigm so pervasive? What has made it an essential element in the construction of individual and collective identity, so much so that we can refer to contemporary Western societies as “trauma cultures” (Lukhurt, 2008)? I already identified in the all-encompassing nature of the trauma concept and its interdisciplinary origin two of the reasons of its success. The trauma category brings together many heterogeneous elements and dimensions. Also, the concept of trauma has materialised under its label social dynamics and interests of different social groups. The diagnosis of trauma, in short, is never neutral but responds to dynamic and unstable historical and political conditions, helping to achieve balances, albeit temporary. I will now be looking to the diagnostic category of the PTSD, to support my investigation.

PTSD, as noted by Branchini (2013), brought together the results of a range of research carried out on subjects exposed to various forms of disrupting events, both personal and collective in a single large pathology. The outcome of a political struggle carried out by psychiatrist, activists, social workers and others, PTSD was officially

recognized as a psychiatric syndrome, to acknowledge the post-war suffering of the veterans of the Vietnam War (Branchini, 2013; Leys, 2000; Withuis J.,2001). It was later consolidated by the work carried out by women's advocates, such as the psychiatrist Judith Hermann, on sexual abuse on children. This more political than scientific origin can still be traced in the emphasis placed by the focus of many psychoanalytic approaches on the role of the external stressor in causing the victim's suffering, at the expense of that of the "internal object". Actually, today again included under a category of pathologies named "Trauma and Stress Related Disorder", PTSD identifies disorders in which exposure to a traumatic event is listed explicitly as a diagnostic criterion (DSM-5), implying a strict cause-effect relationship between events and psychological consequences. The first of the eight groups in which the diagnostic criteria are listed, refers solely to the stressors capable of triggering the syndrome and to the condition in which it is experienced by individuals. A risk factor for the development of a PTSD syndrome is the exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: direct experiencing the traumatic event(s); Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others; Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental; Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g., first responders collecting human remains: police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse). It should be note that, with the passing years, the category of those who might be diagnosed with PTSD has expanded. While, at the beginning, PTSD was attributable only to those who had directly experience a disrupting event, according to the DSM-5, are also at a risk of developing PTSD

witnesses, including bystanders, rescue workers, relatives caught up in the immediate aftermath, or in the proximity. As observed by Luckhurst (2008) this category has been further widened to include the receiving of news of the death or injury of a familiar member or a close friend. Although, in the DSM-5 are explicitly excluded those individuals exposed to stressors through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures, unless the exposure is work related, the concept of *vicarious traumatization* has been used within *trauma studies*, to support the hypothesis of the transmissibility of trauma through media (Kaplan 2005). However, this poses problems of entitlement. If the trauma can be extended to those who did not experience it directly, then, who has the right to speak?

Thus, in summary, while the PTSD syndrome works as an all-encompassing pathology, merging in a single theory victims of sexual abuse, war survivors, war veterans, Holocaust survivors, war victims and perpetrators who feel guilty for the atrocities they have committed, it also conceals the diverse origin of the trauma characterising the pre-80s psychiatric literature on concentration camps survivors and victims of military combats civilian disasters, and other traumas (Leys, 2000). This heterogeneity of both, the symptoms and the events that should cause them derives from the interdisciplinary development of the trauma concept. As Branchini (2013) summaries well, although it pervades contemporaneity, the notion of trauma derives from the transformation of a concept that is anything but postmodern, arising in the context of the incipient industrial society, at the intersection among “law, psychiatry and war industry” (p.390), to culminate in the inclusion of the PTSD syndrome in the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders the* (DSM) in 1980, as mentioned above. It is solely the original interdisciplinarity, placing it at the crossroads between different thematic areas, what makes the formalisation of the



concept of trauma an arduous and long-debated question. Developed in different theoretical contexts, with differing epistemological assumptions and ‘rules of use’ - to put it to Foucault - that reorganise its meaning, the concept of trauma brings together “far-flung and heterogeneous resources” (Lukhurst, 2008, p.19). Furthermore, the very history of its development has gone through moments of intense theoretical elaboration and others of oblivion, so much so that Herman (1994) stated that “the history of trauma is *itself* traumatized” (Herman 1994, p.7 in Lukhurst, 2008, p.19). Similar lines of inquiry have been taken up, abandoned, rediscovered later, in the last century, making it hard to draw a unified/single narrative. Because of what has been stated, while we must renounce the idea of a single, uniform, and trans-historic concept of psychological trauma, it is still possible to approach it in a Foucauldian. Because concepts emerges discontinuously perspective and in dispersed sites, I will be focusing on some of the essential stages of its formation to understand which historical events have given to it the above-mentioned pervasiveness.

### **3.2.1. The “Spinal syndrome”**

The rise of the “spinal syndrome” could demonstrate how the mutual interaction of multidisciplinary factors and discourses concurred to shape the idea of trauma. Moreover, it is a first example of one of the many epistemological shifts which, over the years, have affected the medical discourse, moving the cause of trauma from the individual’s psyche, to the external events, and vice versa. The construction of blaming and victimizing narratives and the birth of the stereotypes of “the victim” and “the liar” responded to these displacements of the causes of trauma.

The *spinal syndrome* appeared at the intersection of new scientific findings and technological and social innovations, including the discovery of the nervous system, the advent of the railway, and the birth of the welfare state. The neurological discoveries about nerves and the role of central nervous system changed the way in which the body and the symptoms were conceptualised. As observed by Bonomi (2000), the moral psychiatry of the first half of the XVIII century, considered the psyche as an organism divided into several parts in harmful conflict with each other. While it offered a sophisticated dynamic model of the human psyche, the idea of psychic trauma as a wound caused by an external agent would have been unconceivable within this theoretical framework as the psychology of passions, at the base of this model, favoured the rise of rebuking narratives, blaming the victims.

The studies on the nervous system carried out in the 18th and throughout the 19th century, gave birth to a real revolution which deeply transformed the medical conception. Symptoms were not generated by an internal imbalance of humours, but from the excitability of the human tissues. Doctors did not longer wonder what internal imbalance caused a disease, focusing instead on what might have provoked it. It is worth noting that the formulation of the diagnosis changed along with the patients' position with respect to their illness. They were no longer responsible for their condition, rather there was the rise of a *no-blaming discourse* in the field of neurology: "inside men there are not so much passions and vices but bundles of nerves" (my translation) (p.2).

However, if symptoms derive merely from the excitement of a nerve, their source must be found in an external cause. The causal factor was found in the social environment shaped by modernity. Cities had become sites of over-stimulation and exhaustion, spaces of "traumatic encounters" (Benjamin, 1973), as a result of the

extensive process of modernisation, characterised by the development of technology, industrialisation, and urbanisation.

The modern individual was not simply shattered by constant shocks and collisions. With its uncontainable bustle of stimuli, the urban experience impacted on the “human sensorium”, namely the cerebral organ responsible to integrate sensory stimuli to an extent, as to cause an “engineering of new selves”. The advent of the railway was not just an outcome of modernisation, but a symbol of it. It deeply impressed the conscience of contemporaries, and contributed to a real anthropological revolution. As supported by Schivelbusch (1986) the impact of the industrialisation on means of transportation was so profound as to “alter the consciousness of passengers” who “develop a new set of perceptions” (Schivelbusch 1986, p. 14 in Lukhurst, 2008).

Because the annihilation of time and space, the locomotive represented symbolically the modernity as much as the railway accidents effectively embodied the terrifying side of it. Whilst, previously, the frightening side of technology was confined to factories, the extraordinary number of railways accidents reported in this period placed the middle- and upper-class travelers in touch with the so called “industrial traumata”, namely, with the consequences of the industrialisation.

The *railway spine*, a diagnosis related to that of the spinal syndrome, was coded to identify the symptoms of passengers involved in railroad accidents. It offers a first example of that oscillation of the meaning of trauma which shall remain a permanent feature of the discourse, up to present days, which see it placed, by rival theories, “at

the opposite ends of the spectrum from physical to psychological aetiologies” (Luckhurst, 2008, p.22)<sup>19</sup>.

In reference to the railway syndrome, two approaches can be identified too. Erichsen (1875), for instance, supported the idea that trauma is a physical injury, caused by an external agent. He theorized that, at the origin of symptoms such as memory disorder, sleep disorder, nightmares, impotence, paralysis, and melancholia, was the ‘concussion of the spine’, resulting from the accident. As noted by Papadopoulos (2021), despite Erichsen’s emphasis on the structural, organic, and bodily dimensions of the railway syndrome, he was aware of their mental effects. Erichsen argued that the emotional response produced by the physical ‘concussion’ had an independent validity of its own. Furthermore, he supported the idea that this emotional response was distinct from hysteria, the closest diagnosis at the time.

A rival trauma theory contested the idea of the organic lesion. Page (1883) contended that, rather than a structural damage, the railway spine was a functional disturbance of the nervous balance, caused by the emotions experienced during the accident. The terror induced by the immediate danger, the hopelessness of escaping from it, and the sudden way in which danger looms over the victim, gave rise to emotions “which in themselves are quite sufficient to produce shock” (Page, 1883, p.148). Page, then, theorised the “purely psychological causes” of nervous disorder, formulating the concept of *nervous shock*, and creating the condition for a semantic shift which located trauma within the framework of physiological changes caused by stress.

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<sup>19</sup> Scholars from various backgrounds will, from now on, focus on this oscillation. Esther Fischer-Homberger (1999) stated that questions of endogenous versus exogenous causes of suffering are closely associated with the history of trauma, together with the issue of guilt. Ruth Leys (2001), wrote about two fundamental and unstable poles: mimesis and anti-mimesis, with the first conceptualising trauma as an experience of hypnotic imitation or identification, while the second refers to the idea that trauma is caused by an external event to the subject which is autonomous

The railway syndrome provides an example of oscillation between different trauma paradigms furthermore highlighting how socio-political issues play a role in coding diagnosis, and how the overlapping terminologies of different disciplines reshape the meaning of concepts. As noted by Lukhurst (2008), the spinal syndrome “is from the beginning a medico-legal problem [...] – defined in, and, through the institutions and discourses, marking the rise of the professional society in 19<sup>th</sup> century” (p. 24). In fact, Page’s insistence on the psychic cause of trauma did not arise only from scientific reasons, but also from socio-political and economical ones. As argued by Lukhurst (2008), Page had worked as surgeon for the London and North-Western Railway Company. Had the victims of railway accidents considered as deserving compensation include those reporting no visible physical injury, this would have represented a huge economic loss for the company. Page’s assimilation of nervous shock to a form of hysteria, equated it to a disease considered shameful, and often dismissed as a sort of disease imitation (neuro-mimesis) or malingering. His position, suggested the idea that symptoms could be feigned for financial advantage, first voicing the sense of ambiguity toward the real nature of the symptoms shown by victims, which crosses all the history of trauma. Page’s position should be placed in the context marked by the raise of the national insurance system and the modern welfare in many European countries such as Germany and UK. A pivotal change in which both, the accident at work, and the railway accident became the point of conjunction around which the modern state emerged bringing together all the professions involved in dealing with compensation claims, including lawyers, psychiatrists, doctors, lawmakers, judges, insurance specialist and company assessors, the economic, political, and bureaucratic elements of the state condensed to “determine and contest the traumatic cost of industrialization” (p.25). The railway

syndrome is an intrinsically modern version of trauma. Born at the juncture between *body* and *machine*, *technology* and *human agency*, it is defined by the effort of rival experts of identifying and interpreting “the protean signs of trauma in their specific disciplinary languages, *recognizing in part that the very act of definition has contributed to the mobility of symptoms*”.( Luckhurst, 2008, p. 24 emphasis added).

### **3.2.2. The Ideo-genetic paradigm and the psychologisation of trauma**

As in the case of the railway syndrome, a novel conceptualisation of trauma took hold at the end of XIX century, as a result of the changes occurring in the socio/legal context and the theoretical developments within the medical field.

New discursive practices, focusing on the personality of the traumatised subject rather than on external events, would eventually emerge, opening the possibility to interpret the traumatic or hysterical symptoms as a simulation, and to perceive subjects as potential liars, though, it was acknowledged that they could lie in a partially unconscious state.

The nerve injury changed constantly nature, from physical to mental representations, semantically shifting along the evolution of medical theories, and leading to the development of the hybrid concept of “psychic trauma” Page’s idea of “nervous shock”, will progress increasingly toward the “ideo-genetic” cause of trauma, without, however, eliminating the body as origin of the illness in the form of predisposition.

In 1884, Adolf Strumpell introduced for the first time the term “psychic trauma”, caused by pathogenic representations originated, in turn by the strong emotions experienced during the accident. Thus, even if physic sensations retain a role, mental representations are placed at centre of the traumatic scene.

Charcot provided a decisive contribution in this direction, elaborating the concept of traumatic hysteria, bringing together a series of nervous symptoms in a single post-traumatic framework. For Charcot, the symptoms resulting from an accident were caused by the ideas, not the damaged nerves. The idea of having incurred serious damage can become pathogenic and cause a multiplicity of nervous symptoms, but this happens only, but when there are mental conditions of clouding and dissociation of consciousness. In these circumstances, trauma can induce a hypnotic state, actualising a non-specific neuropathic predisposition, favouring the fixation of the pathogenic idea. Charcot, considered traumatic hysteria as a real disease, leaving its organic causes in the background. The pathogenic idea is compared to a parasite settled in the motor cortex, and the nervous disorder as a *lesion dynamique* which, although it is only identifiable with psychology, is well anchored in neurophysiology. Charcot, in short, develops a unitary theory explaining, at the same time, the paralysis in the absence of organic lesions, and rebutting the idea that hysterics lie. Therefore, hysterics are no longer simulators but victims of an obsessive idea, beyond their control. Charcot paved the way for redefining hysteria as a mental illness, a transformation that will establish a “psychological paradigm” in German medical culture.

The “ideogenic” interpretation of psychic symptoms and the psycho-traumatic generalisation of hysterical symptoms led Mobius, in 1888, to suggest to name hysterical all those physical modifications caused by representations. Moebius

considered hysteria only a pathological intensification of a disposition present in every person. Generalising the psycho-traumatic interpretation of hysterical symptoms, however, posed the substantial problem of redefining the boundaries between common hysteria and traumatic hysteria as defined by Charcot.

As noted by Bonomi (2001), if all the hysterical symptoms were equally psychogenic, there would, then, only be two possibilities “either the picture of the traumatic hysteria dissolved into the common hysteria (and that meant admitting that the "traumatized "subjects were doing comedy) or one sought to preserve the specificity of the post-traumatic picture by placing limits on psychogenic interpretation” (p.6). Whilst, according to the first option, the trauma loses all specificity, as its effects can be explained as “hysteria”, the second option seeks anchorage in the body to escape contradiction.

Janet, who embraced this second solution, thought that the hystero-traumatic symptoms were created by a disease that weakened the mind of certain functions, affecting their reaction to traumatic situations. Subjects exposed to disrupting events lose the ability to forget, a disability produced by dissociation. The ideas caused by accidents, do not succumb to the process of oblivion, but are exaggerated and fixed in an area of the mind where they escape the confrontation of consciousness. Because the dissociation of consciousness cannot be explained psychologically, these symptoms must be secondary, being the direct manifestation of a weakening of the central nervous system.

As noted by Bonomi (2001), also Oppenheim did not believe victims of psychic trauma were acting and attempted to demonstrate it with his theory of the “traumatic neurosis”. This diagnostic category, introduced in 1888, brought back the post-traumatic framework, which Charcot identified as hysteria, in the context of nerve



diseases (neurosis). Oppenheim, familiar with Charcot's work, conducted five years of clinical observation at the Charité in Berlin. His study was based on 41 male patients, victims of accidents at work, suffering from psychic symptoms.

Oppenheim concluded that mechanical impact was the cause of functional cerebral disorders, located in the centres of motility and sensitivity, originating symptoms such as disorientation, aphasia, inability to stand and walking disturbances, tremors, sleep -disorders. In addition to the mechanical shock, Oppenheim hypothesised a psychic trauma (i.e a fright) whose long lasting consequences originated from a functional nervous disorder. Therefore, the nature of psychic symptoms was secondary.

German accident legislation profoundly influenced the conceptualisation of trauma and its reception, even in the medical field. The imperial office accepted Oppenheim's *traumatic neurosis* as an illness entitled to grant an invalidity pension, giving doctors the decisional power on the patient's social right, through medico-legal certification. However, not all the doctors welcomed the institutionalisation of traumatic neurosis as some believed that it was iatrogenic and that the forensic examinations led to an aggravation of symptoms. Diagnosis of "frightening traumatic neurosis" appeared to them nothing more than an artifact created by insurance companies.

It is interesting that, the mere fact that the traumatic neurosis entitled the patient to a compensation, generated the fear of an epidemic among doctors, to the point to nickname it "retirement neurosis", even though the cases never exceeded 1 or 2% of all pension claims (Bonomi, 2001).

Up to this moment, for the idea to become pathogenic, there was a need not only for the context of the accident, but also for a predisposition, identified as "disease" impoverishing the mind (neuro-psychological model). This approach, based on

organic disease, implies the non-responsibility of the sick for their symptoms. However the pathogenic process can now be explained entirely in a psychological way and connected, for instance, to the desire for a pension. As Bonomi (2001) argues “the reason does not create the symptom, but it creates the disposition for an idea to become cogent and produce a symptom. The idea that the arm is paralyzed can produce the symptom not so much because it cannot be verified but because it is not wanted to be verified. The desire for a pension is so strong that it predisposes to believe that the arm is paralyzed” (p 8). This transformation has notable consequences, while according to the “neuro-psychological” model, the disposition was the result of a deficiency of the mind (the functional disease of the CNS), in this second model, the “psychological” disposition is due to the personality (Bonomi, 2001). The disposition to get sick is not organic but rooted in the personality. As noted by Bonomi (2001), this second model facilitates the interpretation of hysterical symptoms, solving “the age-old problem of simulation”, because “in the new psychological perspective the tendency to lie becomes the fundamental trait of the hysterical personality” (p.8) (my translation). As Bonomi (2001) rightly notes, this point is in line with a general paradigm shift, taking place at the end of the 19th century leading, in the frame of the Foucauldian theory, to focus from the act to personality, and to the psychologization of human actions (see Bonomi, 2001, p.8 footnote n.9)

The progressive psychologisation of trauma, and its institutionalisation in German legislation, gave rise to a debate whose fundamental terms remain open today. Are traumatic symptoms genuine or simulated? Do they depend on organic or psychological dysfunctions? And above all, what degree of connection between an

event and its psychic consequences can be established? As pointed out by Papadopoulos (2021)

“What Erichsen argued was that it is perfectly logical to expect a physical injury to affect most of the psychosocial dimensions of a person’s life. His claim reminds another key dispute in the current debates around trauma. How far can one stretch the link between an injurious event and the multiplicity of its alleged ‘traumatic’ effects?” (p. 221).

Certainly, these questions also originated from by the incommensurability between the demands of law and the necessity of defining a more subjective dimension of the human being, such as the psyche. As summarized by Papadopoulos (2019):

With the very introduction of the word trauma, a clash was established between the legal discourse, which requires demonstrable evidence that can be argued objectively and the psychological/psychiatric/psychosocial discourses, which privilege the human and subjective experience (p.222).

Here we see an emerging pattern which, albeit with due distinctions, recurs in modern asylum system. It is a sequence of the process at the base of what Foucault called bio-medical power. On the one hand, we are witnessing a process of delegation of power from the judicial institution to the medical profession through the instrument of medical-legal certification. On the other, the consequences of this delegation imply increased suspicion toward the victims of the traumatic event, delegitimising their experience in the absence of a medical evaluation. As claimed by Didier & Fassin (2005):

“The medical certificate leads to a reification of the asylum seeker’s body. Detached from the lived experience of the victims of persecution, it attempts

their objectification through experts' words and ends up in de-subjectifying it" (p. 598)

The debate opposing supporters of the victims of trauma and those inclined to comply with current regulations, and to seek objective evidence, extended to the wider social structures. The quarrel can be summarised as:

“[...] the clash between two sharply divided groups of people: those who empathise with the suffering of the vulnerable person and those whose emphasis is on the preservation of a neat legal system that promotes an efficient and prosperous economy” (Papadopoulos, 2021, p.222)

Papadopoulos (2021) notes that the criticism, among the opponents of Oppenheim's traumatic neurosis, was not aimed only at the subject accused of simulating, but at the entire working class and the German Democratic Party accused of causing a moral decline that would push workers to live on benefits. Similarly, today's debate on involuntary dislocated persons polarised in two factions, one supporting them and the other framing them as parasites and impostors.

### **3.2.3 The Vietnam War and the construction of the Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD) diagnostic category**

The Vietnam War was another important moment in defining trauma as we understand it today. Once again, the 'label of trauma' was adopted by a particular social group, the American veterans, to legitimate their experience for legal dispute and compensation (Papadopoulos, 2021). Given the vast range of studies focusing on the Vietnam War, I will summarise a few key points.

Firstly, the Vietnam War was received in a highly ambiguous way by American public opinion. After the end of the Second World War, Western citizens enjoyed a period of economic growth and increased well-being. From mid-1960s circa, protest movements, mainly composed by students, began to rise. Their criticisms concerned the materialist society which, they believed, promoted conformism and social alienation. These criticisms also affected the psychiatric establishment, leading to the development of an anti-psychiatric movement. This complex and heterogeneous movement was composed on one hand by exponents of health professions and psychiatrists, such as Laing (1969) author of “The Divided Self”, who attacked the medicalising approach of psychiatry, equating mental distress to an organic disease, employing stigmatising diagnostic categories to control deviance from social norms, and using controversial practices such as lobotomy and electric shock. On the other, the wider protest movement supported the anti-psychiatrist's criticisms contesting the power acquired by the medical class and the professionals’ attitude to impose social conformity supporting ‘authoritarian establishment’ (Papadopoulos, 2021). Foucault’s works on the history of madness, and Goffman’s on the asylum, matured within this context.

This socio-historical background is a key to understand both the ambiguous reception of the war by the public opinion, and the role played by the introduction of the diagnostic category of PTSD. The social protest movement strongly opposed the Vietnam War, perceived as instrumental to an authoritarian establishment. At the same time, however, the images of distressed soldiers did not leave the American public indifferent. As Papadopoulos (2021) points out, the public opinion:

“could not remain unsympathetic to the plight of their own soldiers, their sons and fathers, being traumatised by their horrendous war experiences” (p.223).

As noted by Papadopoulos (2021), the introduction of the PTSD in 1980 as a distinct diagnostic category in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM III) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) restored dignity to psychiatry, discredited by the anti-psychiatric movement, accusing it, of not being scientific. At the same time it contributed to solve the conflict between those who blamed the Vietnam veterans and those who regarded them as heroes. How did PTSD accomplish these objectives? The PTSD diagnostic category replaced that of “Traumatic Neurosis” in DSM II, which derived its conceptual assumptions from Charcot, Janet, and Freud, focusing mainly on the individual intrapsychic dimension. Traumatic Neurosis’ definition regarded the neurotic personality of the patient as the main cause of the symptoms of the traumatized subject. In fact, it was defined as “an intrapsychic conflict that results in symptoms that unconsciously serve to control anxiety” (Young, 1995, p.98 in Papadopoulos, 2021, p.224). However, such definition would have stigmatised veterans, who had already been coldly received by the public, even because their psychic disorders.

PTSD, instead, identifies the ‘stressor’, namely the external event, as the cause of the trauma. Shifting the aetiology of the trauma from the personality of the subject, to the event had enormous consequences. Firstly, the diagnostic category of PTSD, absolved the subject, as their personality did not play a role in their pathology. Thus, the implicit message conveyed by PTSD was that any person going through abnormal circumstances is prone to developing psychiatric symptoms. Secondly, the diagnostic category of PTSD provided a clear label for those hardships suffered by the veterans, now seen as victims of the horrors of war.

The diagnosis of PTSD allowed veterans to legitimately claim compensation from the government that had initially tried to hinder the introduction of the diagnostic category, fearing litigation and negative publicity. As noted by Papadopoulos (2021):

PTSD solved many problems. It provided a way out of the American society's uneasiness as to how to treat its returning veterans. Regardless of their political position with reference to the controversial Vietnam War, the American public now had a rational reason to support its veterans; after all, psychiatry confirmed that they were suffering from an identifiable mental affliction, PTSD, which was scientifically established, and consequently, they deserved to be treated with care and compassion. Lastly, the veteran themselves, once diagnosed as PTSD suffers, finally, had a legitimate claim for compensation" (p.224).

However, this form of political psychologisation was not devoid of consequences. Ehrenhaus (1993) summarises the matter as follows; Following a phase of repression of the war memories and their personifications, the institution of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Veterans Day, in 1982, opened the way to a new phase: "the need to remember supplanted the need to forget" (p.77). Being, finally, able to face its past, America could embrace its soldiers, unfairly marginalized, making amends for having "turned its back on its own sons" (p.77).

Veterans were free to face the traumatizing effect of the war and the social stigma they had to deal with. Finally, there was a time for reconciliation and reintegration, "both personal and national" (p.78). However, the cultural narratives which transformed them "from pariah to patriot" (p.78), rest on a therapeutic motif portraying veterans through metaphors of psychological dysfunction, emotional fragility, healing and personal redemption.

"The motif casts all issues and questions of relationship in matters related to Vietnam - be they personal, cultural or political - in terms of healing and

recovery. The body is ravaged by war; the wounded must make peace with what remains. The mind is haunted by images, aromas and sounds; veterans must learn to face their demons. Identity is fractured by the contradictory injunctions of survival in a war zone and those of civilized conducted back in “the world” (the latter of which requires the warrior persona to be concealed; the veterans must build a new sense of the self” (p.81).

Some of the themes that compose the societal narratives on refugees are, here, recognizable: the body ravaged by war, the identity fractured by living in between two worlds, the need to build a new sense of the self, and, above all, the trauma which haunts the mind by images, aromas, sounds. Therefore, the same therapeutic motif, subsuming under its imperative all the issues around veterans and Vietnam war, seems today to frame the public debate on refugees. A final note regarding the ambiguous nature of PTSD which on the one hand legitimizes the suffering of patients and contributes to socially rehabilitating the victims, but on the other it medicalizes them:

“The PTSD diagnosis has a very paradoxical effects because, on the one hand, it conveys up to a point that the person responds normally to abnormal circumstances, and therefore, there is nothing’ pathological’ in him or her, and yet, on the other hand, this condition is not a simple psychological response to an event, but an actual psychiatric disorder. In this way, the PTSD diagnosis contains a strong ambivalence toward pathology.” (Papadopoulos, 2019, p 225)

This contradiction is still at the centre of the debates on medicalization and the so-called "refugee trauma".

### **3.3 Trauma: two paradoxes**



Approaching 'trauma', we must face a contradiction difficult to resolve. Considering it from a mere psychiatric or psychoanalytic perspective, as a wound that open in the individual mind or in the collective psyche, - we miss the power dynamics culturally shaped by nosographic categories. 'Diagnosis' comes from the Greek δια γινώσκω, 'to recognise through'. According to the literary meaning, making a diagnosis means to recognise in the patient a condition present *before* medical intervention, by examining the symptoms. Medical anthropology, however, highlighted how to diagnosing is closer to an act of interpretation, dense of cultural assumptions. Symptoms acquire sense within the doctors' cultural universe and their implicit theories on the nature of body, pathology, and health.

Culture is already present in the doctor's gaze when it rests on the patient's body and moulds the diagnostic construction. As mentioned by Coppo (2003), The hypothesis that mental illnesses are the expression of a 'natural' and therefore universally biological core is currently unproven. Mental illness can be grasped solely within the "devices" (either linguistic, cultural, ideological, methodological) developed to understand and manage it. Since these devices are culturally determined, their application outside the context in which they were developed is problematic. Franz Fanon (1952) highlighted the link among medicine, psychiatry, and colonialism, challenging the universality of concepts as the Oedipus complex and the collective unconscious. Foucault, among the firsts, pointed out that diagnosis are also vehicle of social relationship and hierarchy of power among social groups with different economic, social and cultural capital, between those who have the power to define the others and those who are defined *by* the others. Bio-medical definitions are expression of a power that acts by producing differences and inscribing them in biology, naturalizing aspects of the identity pertaining, instead, to the historical and socio-cultural realm. In the context of forced migration, Beneduce (2016) stated that the symptoms of migrant patients talk about the story of colonization as much

as they express individual discomfort. The diagnoses, and especially those of PTSD, while identifying the individual's traumatic experience, conceal the socio-political backdrop of pain, the "political, racial and historical roots of suffering" (p.261). The dynamics of "forgetting/remembering" typical of trauma, when talking about migrants, reveal the images of a traumatic collective past, inherited by the subject. These symptoms can also be interpreted as forms of resistance which pave the way to a new historical awareness.

However, if dealing with trauma, we only adopt the 'genealogical' perspective, more sensitive to the social and political significance of the diagnosis, we assume that power relations take place in a sort of affective vacuum, or rather, that the emotional dimension and the 'affect' have not any significant consequence on the power dynamics forcing subjects towards a subordinate position. But emotions and affects are not a transparent backdrop. Yet the clashes between social groups, the marginalization of minorities, do not take place on anesthetized subjects. Where do emotions end up? Philosophical-social -research investigate at least one emotion: suffering, especially with reference to the body. The core of Foucault's work focuses on the grip of power on bodies through the link of suffering (1973, 1975, 1979, 1980a). "*Disciplines and Punish: the birth of the Prison*" (1975) opens with the chronicle of a torture, which spares no details on the torture inflicted to the victim, and continues with the description of the body discipline. In the field of medical anthropology, the Cartesian legacy of the separation between body and mind has been challenged. In *The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology* (1987) Scheper-Hugh N., & Lock M.M., denounce the lack of conceptual frameworks to address the mind-body –society interactions, and the absence of integrated models to understand "the myriad ways in which the mind speaks through the body, and the ways in which society is inscribed on the expectant canvas of human flesh" (p.10). The dichotomies among body, psyche and society are reproduced even within those disciplines that had set out to overcome them: "Yet, even in psychoanalytically informed

psychiatry and in psychosomatic medicine there is a tendency to categorize and treat human afflictions as if they were either wholly organic or wholly psychological in origin: “it” is in the body, or “it” is in the mind [...]Moreover, when diagnostic tests indicated some organic explanation, the psychological and social aspects of the pain tended to be all but forgotten, and when severe psychopathology could be diagnosed, the organic complications and indices tended to be ignored. Pain, it seems, was either physical or mental, biological or psycho-social-never both nor something not-quite-either” (pp.9-10).

However, not even the excellent work of the anthropologists addresses the relationship between sensations, emotions, mental representations, and power. The methodological and interpretative strategies do not include the study of *affect*. Nevertheless, the history of trauma is dense of emotions. Bruner (2002) pointed out that the history of the discourse on trauma is, also, the history of a suspicion and of the individuals, social groups, and bodies on which it has been cast. A combination of elements such as “the precarious nature of claims of chronic traumatisation, combined with the possibility of substantial gain from traumatic suffering in terms of money, power, or status” (p.180), made suspicion intrinsic to the discourse of trauma. In fact, the introduction of trauma aetiologies and diagnoses, was shaped not only by scientific theories but also by the suspicion against patients, and by the inverse inclination “to prevent suspicions from being cast on those who were perceived as victims” (p.182). What prompted medical practitioners to take a stand for or against the parties involved in the dispute were not just rational reasons. As well as the possibility of substantial financial gain or loss, and the need to bring legal procedures to a practical conclusion, Bruner identifies also the intrinsic moral dimension of trauma and the adversarial nature of the legal setting, as factors that urged doctors to advocate or oppose a model of traumatic disorder. Bruner’s description is dense of emotions; however, a purely narrative approach does not help to explore them. Neither has it provided a framework to conceptualise the relationship among individuals, emotions, affects and power.

It tells us that politics and affects are connected, that politic becomes *affect* or that *affects* can have political consequences but it does not explain how these dynamics work.

### 3.3.1 Figures of culture and figure of the psyche

Dealing with the history of trauma, there is another paradox, worthing of attention. We have seen that medical theories depend on their cultural context. The birth of a new diagnostic category is related to a given socio-political setting and to the social dynamics involving, in that context, groups with different political interests. The labels *spinal syndrome*, *hysteria*, *PTSD* - if placed within their historical and ideological context - disclose the story of a unique, unrepeatable political and social situation.

At the same time, however, it seems possible to recognize within the historical flow a form of regularity, albeit discontinuous, as suggested by Foucault. Although the figures of the hysteric, the veteran, the refugee belong to completely different ideological scenarios and would not be fully understood if approached through the lens of universal medical models, they embody different aspects of the same figures of the victim and the malingerer.

Papadopoulos (2002) notes that “Ironically, as trauma tends to polarise positions and reduce complexities to simplistic formulae within individuals and groups, so does the refugee trauma-discourse impose simplistic connection between the events and psychological experience” (p.2). I suggest that this kind of polarisation can be also observed on the scientific and specialistic theories which are assumed to be “value-free”. According to Leys (2000), in fact, doubts about the victims’ reliability, as well as the contrary need to safeguard their credibility by emphasizing the role of the external event “that entails violence and victimhood (Brunner, 2002, p.183), are rooted within the medical and psychoanalytic scientific theories on trauma. Leys, approaching

“genealogically” the historical evolution of the concept, ranging from Freud to contemporary neurobiological approaches, pointed out the continuous tension or oscillation between two theoretical paradigms, which she names *mimetic* and *anti-mimetic*. After stressing the role played by hypnosis in the conceptualization of trauma, she defined the first paradigm as corresponding to those theories that define it as a situation of dissociation or “absence” from the self. In this predicament, the victim unconsciously imitated, or identified with, the aggressor or traumatic scene, in a condition comparable to “a state of heightened suggestibility or hypnotic trance” (p.8). This experience of hypnotic imitation or identification- defined *mimesis* – shatters the victim’s cognitive perceptual capacities, making the traumatic experience unavailable for recollection. The victim, being totally immersed in the traumatic scene, does not enjoy the speculative distance necessary for cognitive knowledge. The subject, according to this model, is ‘altered’, because, being dissociated in a heterogeneous role, is no more the same but ‘other’ (p.9). However, while the mimetic-suggestive theory, on the one hand, explains the “victim’s suggestibility and abjection”, on the other, it represents an attack to the ideal of individual autonomy and responsibility. In addition, the possibility of confabulation which is associated with hypnosis questions the victim’s reliability. In Leys’s words: “the notion of mimesis tended to call into question the veracity of the victim’s testimony as to the veridical or literal truth of the traumatic origin and hence to make traumatic neurosis and traumatic memory a matter of suggested fabrication or simulation” (p.10). To counteract the risk of discrediting victims, an anti-mimetic pole tended to relegate to a secondary position hypnosis and hypnotic suggestion to “re-establish a strict dichotomy between the autonomous subject and the external trauma” (p.9). These two poles do not follow each other in a linear fashion but regularly re-emerge one balancing the other.

Currently, the different theories on trauma highlight the importance of the stressful event, and therefore of contextual factors, or the relevance of the intrapsychic dynamics, of individual constitutional factors and of the subject's personality. Scientific thinking and socio-political factors interacted, creating the premise for the dichotomous opposition between victim and persecutor, but certain moral stances or, more generally, the affect, will play a pivotal role to the conjuring up of the Victim-Persecutor couple.

### **3.4 Trauma and Jungian informed theories.**

In this section, I will propose that Jungian informed theories can provide an effective framework to address the multidimensionality of trauma. I believe that the ideas of network of archetypal images and of cultural complex provide useful concepts to link and keep together different aspects of trauma, without splitting them. Both archetypal images and cultural complexes link individuals with their socio-cultural environment, addressing the relationship between intrapsychic and social realm. They both are emotionally charged, and can 'take' individuals when they are activated.

First, I shall spend few words clarifying what the terms '*affect*' and 'emotions' mean. Emotion comes from the Latin word *movere*, which means to move (Milani & Richardson 2021). Barrett & Bliss-Moreau (2009) stress that the word "*affect*" in English, means: "to produce a change" (p.167). The Italian '*affetto*' derives from the Latin *adfectus*, from *adficere*, that is, *ad e facere*, which means "to do something for". The '*affect*', therefore, refers to something that moves; a movement towards something or somebody that – by producing a change - influences people and situations. While in science of emotion '*affect*' defines anything emotional, in

psychology the term comprehends emotions, but does not correspond entirely to them. Barrett & Bliss-Moreau (2009) write:

The “affect” refers to the mental counterpart of internal bodily representations associated with emotions, actions that involve some degree of motivation, intensity, and force, or even personality dispositions (p.167).

Therefore, the “*affect*”, associates emotions with mental representations of internal states rooted in the body. The *affect* plays a role in many psychological phenomena, among which the process of stereotyping and prejudice. In fact, serving as a source of information in the judgment process, affective states could influence evaluative judgments (Bodenhausen, et. al., 2001). The idea of *affect* as rooted in individuals’ brains and bodies, popular in the bio-medic sciences, has been challenged in various disciplinary fields. Sarah Ahmed (2014), for instance, argues that that the *affect* is not “in”, or indeed “outside of” the individual or the social. Rather, it “relates to the circulation of emotion between different sites, objects or bodies” (Ahmed, 2014, in Milani & Richardson, 2021, p.674). Language and more specifically discourses are certainly one of those objects through which affect circulates in the public domain. But the ways in which this circulation “works *in* and *through* discourses” (Milani & Richardson, 2021, p.674) has not been explored enough. Wetherell (2012) points out that in social and cultural research, the psychology of *affect* “has a hidden in plain view status”, an “elephant in the room, edged around and patted away” (. 140). Nevertheless, questions need to be answered about what type of energy is it that pushes and pulls the bodies of citizens in contemporary social formations, challenging them affectively, mobilizing their brains, bodies and minds? (Wetherell, 2012).

### 3.4.1 Renos Papadopoulos and the network of archetypal images

Papadopoulos (2011) expands Jung's theories to address the interrelationship between intrapsychic and social / collective realms which for Jung encompassed nature society and culture, the whole "surrounding lived environment that the individual interacts with" (p.213), including ideas and beliefs. Jung conceptualised the archetypes as pre-existing 'intrapsychic facts', of human species-specific 'prototype' structures that despite not produced by personal experiences, they are, nevertheless triggered by them. The archetypes then both, create themselves the very preconditions for enabling us to register objects, events and situation, and shape our experiences. They behave in a manner similar to cognitive schemes, but differ from them first because they put the individuals in contact with contents that had never belonged to the individual unconscious before. Second because they are deeply connected to both, the body and to an affective dimension which account for the strong grip exerted on individuals who literally can see and feel, in certain moment, only what the archetypes dictated to them. Papadopoulos (2011) recognizes that having been forged in clinical practice, Jung's ideas can be speculative when applied to the social realm. He, therefore, employs the concept of the *Umwelt* the two dimensions of the intrapsychic phenomena and external world can be bridged, avoiding psychologising the socio-political phenomena and overcoming the dualistic formulation that position archetypes either in the neurobiological or social realm. He proposes, instead, an understanding of the archetypal realms as located within the bio-semiotic sphere.

The *Umwelt*, indeed, refers to that portion of the surrounding environment experienced by a living creature which is of relevance for her and that "[...] *changes*



*its significance* in accordance with the mood operative at a given moment” (my italics) (English and English, 1958, 568, in Papadopoulos, 2011, p. 215) with limit dictated by the biological endowment of each species. As humans connect with their environment through the mediation of language, culture, social representations, in a word, through the semiotic realm, the *Umwelt* can be understood “*ensembles of meaning*” (Harré and Lamb, 1986, 162) and defined as “a ‘meaning centre’ (cf. Sonesson, 2007) where our biological and meaning-making potentialities interact with our surrounding environment in a coherent whole that can be justly understood as bio-semiotic” (Papadopoulos, 2011, p, 215).

As for Jung motives and themes, which he conceptualised as archetypes, are not activated in isolation but as a network of associated motifs, Papadopoulos (2011), suggested that ‘archetypes affect individuals and groups not in isolation but in clusters /networks/constellations’, namely, in ‘networks of archetypal images’ forming what he called “collective structures of meaning” (p. ). These structures can extend an individual’s relationship with the *Umwelt* making possible to encounter unknown parts of it, even if they were not part of one’s personal experience.

### **3.4.2 Singer’s cultural complex**

Kalsched (2013) pointed out that trauma alone does not shatter the psyche; rather it is the psyche to shatter itself through its own self-defence system. Because the psyche/defence system focuses on survival, it interprets any attempt to develop and grow as dangerous and needing to be punished. This is why it can become as

traumatogenic as the original trauma. An effective comparison is that with the immune system when sometimes it goes haywire and attacks back one's own tissues. In the same way, despite the Daimon-Protector system has the purpose of preserving the ego from annihilation anxiety converting the latter into a more manageable fear, it unleashes against the psyche and risk to fragment it. What happens after experiencing a disrupting event at individual level can be summed up as follow. The original perpetrators of the trauma are internalised as archaic, typical representations. These archetypal images will become part of the Daimon-Protector defences. While the true self goes into "inner hibernation" behind the protective barrier of the Daimones— which can be alternately protective and torturing, a false self begins to manage the relationship with the outside world.

Tomas Singer (2004) proposes that Kalsched's model applies to a group's response to trauma too. The traumatized group can form a series of protector / persecutory leaders, who nurture, protect and / or torture the spirit of the group. These leaders are the embodiment of the group's defences systems which is mobilized to protect the hurt divine child of the group identity, and the group "ego" from sense of annihilation. This approach implies the existence of cultural complexes in which the traumatic experience of a group has been structured over many generations. Cultural complexes intermediate between the personal and archetypal level of the psyche linking between the individual, society, and the archetypal realms. They can be confused with personal complexes. Personal "feeling toned complexes" (Jung CW 8, pars 200-3) have been defined as "the image of a certain psychic situation which is strongly accentuated emotionally and is, moreover, incompatible with the habitual attitude of consciousness" (Jung CW 8, pars 200-3). The complex is structured as an image and a frozen traumatic personal memory, but this core image is made up of two parts: a

psychic trace of the originating trauma and an archetypal piece closely associate to it (Stein, 1998). All these pieces are glued with emotion. Despite there is a continuum in the content and structure of complexes that ranges from the personal to the cultural to the archetypal, cultural complexes' origin is not in personal experience. When they are triggered, they channel through group life and experience all of the emotion of the personal and the archetypal realm. They are, thus, both internalised on the psyche of individuals and lived put in group life.

## **Chapter**

### **IV**

# **Methodology**

## **Premise**

In this chapter I will present the methodology employed to analyse the discursive construction of the “Diciotti Case”. This section is structured as follows. I will offer a detailed exposition of the which make up this research project, such as research

design, data sources and the criteria for their selection, the methods employed for data collection and analysis, and my ethics statement. Before delving into these topics, however, I will be discussing the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this work and that have oriented and informed all my methodological choices.

For the sake of clarity, I will give here a rather basic and surely non-exhaustive definition of the two terms. Ontology comes from two Greek words: *ōn/ontos*, which means "being" and *logia*, which means "study", "discourse". Therefore, ontology is that branch of philosophy that deals with the 'nature of being and existence' and seeks to classify and explain entities. In reference to social reality, it deals with the question: "what kind of facts are social facts?" Or: do natural facts – or "brutes", as Searle (1995) defines them – have the same status as social ones? Epistemology, on the other hand, derives from the Greek *epistēmē* ("knowledge") and, again, *logia* and accordingly, it is sometimes referred to as the "theory of knowledge", that is, that discipline which investigates how it is possible to know. The epistemology of social sciences includes a varied set of investigations into the theories, languages and conceptual tools of social scientists, questioning how knowledge about the social world is produced and how this knowledge is scientific, i.e. different from that of common sense (Sparti, 2002). When dealing with the explanations of social phenomena and the theories within which they are inscribed by researchers, the epistemologist of the social sciences asks herself within which communication context these explanations make sense and how the theories operate "when they describe reality, when they understand and explain it." (Sparti, 2002, p. 14).

As it is easy to understand, the ontological position adopted by the researcher influences her epistemological choices, but also the choice of the most suitable

methodological approach to collect, analyse and interpret data. I hope that this will emerge clearly in the next paragraph, where I will be describing my research design.

## **4.1 Research design**

Let's say from the outset that that this work can be labelled, somewhat schematically, as a piece of critical-qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013), where an analytic approach inspired by Foucauldian discourse analysis is applied to investigate a particular case referred to as the "Diciotti case". The case itself will be illustrated in detail in the next chapter. Here I will simply mention that the caption "Caso Diciotti" refers to the controversial decision taken in August 2018 by Italy's then Interior minister Matteo Salvini to ban disembark of 177 refugees rescued by the Italian patrol boat "Ubaldo Diciotti". Coastguard ship Diciotti was docked in the port of Catania from the 20th to the 26th of August 2018 until an agreement with E.U was found for the relocation of the asylum seekers. People aboard of the Diciotti received food and medical assistance but were forbidden to leave the ship. Because of his decision, Matteo Salvini was investigated for kidnapping by the Agrigento prosecutor's office. My research on this case is based on a critical analysis of a variety of texts, including political speeches, interviews of Italian politicians, newspaper and magazine articles, posts on social media and national TV broadcasts).

### **4.1.1 Ontological and epistemological assumptions**

By defining this work as a *critical qualitative study*, I am assigning to language the role of privileged means to access the social world. While this is an assumption underpinning much of the social research conducted after the so called ‘linguistic turn’ in the social sciences, my focus is not on how language *reflects* reality, but rather how language *creates* it. In short, I take what is called a constitutive or productive view on language (Weedon, 1997). From this statement, it will probably be clear to the reader that I reject any form of realist ontology. I do not believe that there is such a thing as one reality that can be revealed through the application of a “correct” methodology (Madill et. al., 2000), nor that there is such a thing as a single, exclusive truth waiting to be discovered. Finally, I don't think what we observe as researchers reflects something that is “out there”. In the “ontological continuum” (Braun & Clark, 2013, p. 26) between realism and relativism, this research aligns, rather, with critical realism. While I do not claim that “reality” is totally dependent on the ways we come to know it, as it is assumed by relativism, I believe that although a pre-social reality exists, we can only partially know it. Our knowledge is socially informed influenced, so while the underlying logic and structures on which our social practices rely might in principle be discovered, we can look at reality only through our system of meanings, which in turn constitute a kind of partially separate reality. Furthermore, I believe that the objects studied by social scientists are different from those investigated by natural scientists. The ontology of social phenomena, indeed, differs from that of natural ones, as it is characterised by self-referentiality and linguisticity (Searle, 1995). Self-referentiality refers to the circumstance that certain social facts acquire their status through the functions that we, who have the capacity for *intentionality*, assign them. Linguisticity refers to the fact that through language we do not only describe the world, but we performatively ‘put in place’ reality.

Being sceptical about the idea that knowledge can be an objective reflection of reality, from an epistemological perspective, I reject any form of positivism or neo-positivism and the idea that scientific theories can reflect or map out reality, directly or in any de-contextualised manner. In my view, the process of knowing is in no way similar to discovering a supposed true nature of the world, out there and ready to be grasped. Rather, I regard knowledge as a process of construction through discourses and systems of meaning we reside in (Berger & Luckman 1967, Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985, 1999). Among the many epistemological approaches available, and being aware that many of these overlap on different levels, I would align this work with a constructionist epistemology.

In particular, the aspect of social constructionism which I find fruitful in relation to this research is that this onto-epistemological approach aims to transcend what Gergen (1985) calls the *exogenic-endogenic* antinomy (p. 269). In fact, it does not comply with the *exogenic perspective* on knowledge, namely, that theoretical standpoint according to which the source of knowledge is the outside world. Embraced by logical empiricists such as Locke, Hume, Mills and, more recently in psychology, by behaviourists this idea assumes that the knowing subject forms their own mental representations starting from the observation of reality, therefore, through an inductive process. Consistently with this premise, knowledge is deemed all the more accurate the more it 'adheres to the contours of the world', and scientific theories must aspire to reflect reality as objectively as possible. Knowledge of the world can be achieved through an experimental approach based on observation, the construction and testing of hypotheses, and the formulation of general rules. In this framework, the task of social science is to explain the facts of the social world, while

to explain consists in identifying the relationships of cause and effect between social phenomena.

While certainly, more subtle and less naïve approaches are available today, such as the neo-positivism of Giddings (1922), we can say that this approach leaves some issues open. I will mention two that are relevant to us. First, it has been noted that theoretical categories cannot be derived from observation since the process of identifying observational attributes depends on the subject's possession of those categories (Gergen, 1985). This objection dismantles the primacy of the object – social environment in this case – over the subject and, thus, the primacy of observation over theory. In fact, observation is never neutral but is underpinned by values, beliefs and conceptions which shape which aspects of the world constitute facts worth observing. As noted by Sparti (2002) “a fact is made knowable as such not by a special property of the fact itself, but rather by the agreement on what contributes to making a certain fact *that* specific fact (where precisely "that" is not given *a priori* but is, in fact, established during the research in the light of the theories used). [...] Without a theoretical background it would not even be possible to proceed with the observation of the facts; starting from scratch, from a purely observational description language, would mean being without anything to start *with*” (pp. 82-83, italics in the original text). Sparti concludes that theory is an integral part of our relationship with the world and, therefore, the world cannot be separated from the ways we use to describe it. These reflections stress the importance for the observer of adopting a reflexive approach towards their own implicit theories, both scientific and lay.

I consider this a central point in my work. First because if it is true that social reality is always constructed by the actors who inhabit it, when it comes to refugees it seems



inevitable that the discourse polarizes on the victim/perpetrator dichotomy as demonstrated in the previous chapters. The uncritical application of these categories – the ways in which we describe refugees – has important repercussions on immigration policies and laws or, to be clearer, on the possibility of creating consensus in public opinion, on the part of the rulers, around ever more restrictive policies. To give a concrete example which will be explored later: it will be easier to get public opinion to accept the unfeasible idea of creating a naval blockade off the coast of Libya and giving up on saving the shipwrecked if the shipwrecked themselves are constructed as dangerous clandestine immigrants. This is a crucial point to keep in mind as a citizen but, above all, as a researcher because the researcher's values and implicit theories do affect the research process too. Following Becker (1967), I believe that it is not possible to do research that is uncontaminated by personal and political sympathy. Having worked for about ten years in the field of asylum, I am aware of how much this experience has contributed to developing my tendency to be on the side of the 'underdogs'. While taking sides is unavoidable, I am also aware that the perspective I am taking is just one side of the picture. As suggested by Becker (1967), one way to tackle these distortions is to use "techniques impartially enough that a belief to which we are especially sympathetic could be proved untrue" (p. 246). Exercising reflexivity within a cultural constructionist approach is, from the point of view of a white woman coming from a European country, with leftist political sympathies, the most suitable methodological resource to monitor the effects of bias and implicit assumptions at play when working with less privileged people.

Another criticism which can be moved to an exogenic approach to knowledge pertains to the relationship between language and its real-world referents. One of the

key questions is whether words can map reality when, as stressed by Gergen (1985), the major constraints over word usage are provided by the linguistic context itself. This observation, extremely relevant for us, found support in the rising concerns over the binding role that linguistic conventions play on the comprehension and definition of mental states and concepts such as mind, intention, sense data or motivation within the philosophy of language (Anscombe, 1976; Austin, 1962b; Ryle, 1949; Wittgenstein, 1953), but also within other disciplines such as cultural anthropology, especially in the work of anthropologists belonging to the interpretive current, such as Clifford Geertz. A certain scepticism is matured with respect to the representative function of language to underline other functions such as the performative one. Languages can also be considered as 'shared activities'. If this scepticism regarding the representative function of language is applied to the inner states of social actors, it will be possible to look at emotions not only as biological artefacts or as "object[s] out there" (Gergen, 1985, p. 267), but as social facts that acquire their meaning in the context of usage. This is not to deny that people feel emotions, but to stress that social contexts affect the meaning that is attributed to them and shape the ways in which they are experienced and expressed. In this light, states such as victimhood, blame and pity are not biological-ahistorical entities collocated in individuals' heads, but are located in a specific socio-cultural context, and in a 'language-games' or discourses. Constructionism, however, does not embrace the *endogenic perspective* of such thinkers as Spinoza, Kant or Nietzsche either, nor that of other phenomenologists, who emphasize how certain tendencies and processes are innate or, at least, endemic to the human organism. According to them, the origin of knowledge would have to be found in the human being's inherent tendency to categorize, organize and process information, which would shape our relationship with reality. Adopting this

perspective, however, would mean neglecting the role of social forces and of power in shaping people's views and behaviours. I do believe that some form of *internal determinant* – let's say the dynamics of the individual psyche plays a role in the genesis of racism. However, if asked the question 'could we say that racism is an entirely psychological issue?' I would answer negatively. We could say that racism is certainly embedded in social structures, but while on one hand these structures are super-ordinate realities with respect to the individual psyches, on the other they are not completely alien from them.

What I find productive in relation to this research project is that, while according to Gergen (1985) the history of epistemology could be summarised and represented as "a continuous series of pendulum swings" (p. 270) between exogenic and endogenic positions, social constructionism tries to overcome this antinomic dualism to stress the social and processual nature of knowledge or, in other words, to "place knowledge within the process of social interchange" (p. 266). The effect of this in psychology is that each concept normally employed in the field, such as emotion, motive, etc. "is cut away from an ontological base within the head and made a constituent of social process" (p. 271). Whether it is in the relationship between people rather than in psychological states that the cause of some effects or rather the meaning of some forms of life must be sought, the conditions have been set for overcoming the subject-object dichotomy and the dualism between individual and society.

#### **4.1.2 Theoretical concepts**

As I have just mentioned, this work can be defined as a *critical qualitative study*, where an analytic approach inspired by Foucauldian discourse analysis, is applied to

investigate the specific case referred to as the “Diciotti case”. In order to observe the set of meanings generated by the intense debate around the Diciotti case, I resorted to concepts and frameworks belonging to different theoretical fields.

The notion of *dialogical network* (Leudar & Nekvapil, 2004; Nekvapil & Leudar, 2006; Leudar et al., 2008) helped me, on one hand, to conceptualise a coherent unit of analysis starting from texts of different kinds; on the other, to account for what I would call the double dimension of discourse. Discourses are, indeed, made of core meanings some may call themes which, as we saw in the second chapter, can be tracked down across different times and places. I will contend that these themes are archetypal, as it will be better clarified later in this work. Nevertheless, discourses are also contingent on contextual social and political activities, which shape them in specific forms to serve different goals and interests. Leudar’s *dialogical networks*, in fact, imply the concept of *intertextuality*, namely the idea that discourses do not exist in isolation but, rather, interact and shape each other. Furthermore, *dialogical networks* bind discourses to their settings. Leudar & Nekvapil (1998) and Nekvapil & Leudar (1998), in fact, argue against a de-situated notion of *discourse*. They admit that being “expressions generalised over disparate dialogical contexts” (Leudar et al., 2008, p. 189), discourses lose connection with those contexts. However, they observe that even generalisations are themselves occasioned, so, rather than independent of the setting, discourses should be “better thought of as occasioned collection[s] of occasioned matters” (p. 189). Thus, in contrast with a notion of discourses as linguistic structures organised in different patterns “that people’s utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life [...]”(Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 2), Leudar et al. (2008) return discourses to their settings and to shared activities through the notion of dialogical network.

A *dialogical network*, thus, assumes the following: first, different kinds of text, such as newspaper articles, TV broadcasts and everyday conversations, which are traditionally studied separately, can be analysed together as a network, focusing on their mutual connections. Second, texts are connected thematically. In other words, the cohesion of the network is provided by commonalities and contrasts in lexicon, metaphors and arguments. Third, they are also interactively connected. This means that, as the unit of the analysis coincides with the network, each piece of data should be considered as collaborative “turn” in a developing dialogical network, similarly to what happens in everyday conversations. In this perspective, verbal actions of individual participants should be viewed as “local, situationally, conditioned acts” (p. 61).

Following Nekvapil and Leudar (2006)’s assumption that the complexity of dialogical networks depends on the topicality of the problem under discussion I suggest that the “Diciotti case” was relevant enough to generate an interactionally productive and complex dialogical network on which I focus as my unit of analysis. Presenting the intensive and detailed study of a single event, this research can be understood as a case study, falling into the category of the *exemplifying case*, which is a case that either epitomizes “a broader category of cases” or provides “a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered” (Bryman, 2012, p. 70). I believe the Diciotti case satisfies both criteria. During his period in office as Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini applied a so called “*porti chiusi*” or “closed-ports” policy, blocking many other NGO-run rescue ships operating in the Mediterranean sea. The case that had the greatest resonance at international level was that involving

the Sea-Watch 3 ship and its Capitan Carola Rackete. In this and other cases, the blocked boats belonged to a foreign NGO that the Interior minister could easily stigmatize and frame as an external enemy. The Diciotti was a patrol vessel belonging to the Italian Coast Guard, which is the National Maritime Authority, an administrative, governmental and policing body with military status. As such, it is subject to the Ministry of the Interior, and the ship itself is considered Italian territory. This being the case, it seemed to me that the story of the Diciotti could show in an unambiguous way the coercive character of the victim triangle dynamic (and of its variant, the victim diamond dynamic), which is likely to be activated in every highly emotional situation, regardless of the specific external circumstances. I would suggest that a communicative action, rather than putting in motion a dialogue, responding to the criteria of sequentiality, would trigger the activation of a network of archetypes and cultural complexes.

I also draw on the Jungian concept of “*feeling toned-complex*”, which is defined by Jung as “[...] the image of a certain psychic situation which is strongly accentuated emotionally and is, moreover, incompatible with the habitual attitude of consciousness” (.). As summarised by Stein (2003) “The complex is an inner object, and at its core it is an image” (p. 48). It is made up of associated images and frozen, repressed traumatic memories, buried in the unconscious and glued by emotion. It has a nuclear element, namely the image and the frozen memory – which is the traumatic experience on which the complex is based – and a number of secondarily constellated associations. The nuclear element, however, is dual: it is composed indeed by “an image or psychic trace of the originating trauma and an innate (archetypal) piece closely associated to it” (Stein, 2003, p. 52). This makes the concept of complex

suitable to analyse the social realm fruitfully, because as it is an intrapsychic reality supported by an archetype, it might help to overcome the dichotomy between the individual mind and the social structure. In fact, part of the complex forms and grows as a result of the individual's experiences in the environment in which they are embedded, which comprises not only their personal family but also the set of relations and interactions made possible (or restricted) by the social institutions and the position occupied within the social structure. While the social realm then shapes the individual's complexes, the individual, with their behaviour, affects and structures the social environment where they live. However, this is not the only way to conceive the relationship between individual mind and social domain. While the complex is an inner object, there might be a close relationship between a psychic image, which is the core of the complex, and external reality, even when the psyche had not made any previous experience of it. The reflex responses in animals in response to specific stimuli, studied by Lorenz (2016), are an example of it. This relation, the correspondence between individual mind and outer reality, is underpinned by an archetype which by drawing on the collective unconscious, seems to connect both mind and social representations to a deeper cultural and historical layer of human experience.

#### **4.1.3 Internet mediated research**

The description of this research design would not be complete without mentioning that this study can be considered an Internet mediated research (IMR), which implies

employing Internet-based data collection methods to gather novel, original data “to be subjected to analysis in order to provide new evidence in relation to a particular research question” (Hewson et al., 2003, in Hewson, 2017, p. 3). Obviously, IMR designs present advantages and disadvantages. Among the former, Thoreau (2006) observed that IMR allows data to be gathered which are not easily obtainable using offline methods, while Bonfadelli et al. (2002) noted how it allows the collapsing of geographical boundaries in ways not easily achievable offline, facilitating cross-cultural research. Among the disadvantages should be included the precariousness of online content, which can be removed, and the ethical issues raised by the virtual environment of internet research. This latter problem will be discussed in the paragraph dedicated to my ethics statement.

#### **4.1.4 Sources of analysis and sampling**

The sources used for this research consist of social media (specifically Facebook) posts, newspaper articles, YouTube videos, web-sites and blogs. Several reasons informed my choice of employing sources from old and new media. First, the fact that media and political communication are deeply intertwined, a phenomenon which has been conceptualised as the “mediatization of politics” (Esser & Stromback, 2014). Esser (2014) talks about a “a reciprocal loop” between the media and politics, highlighting that while politicians accept that political communication is shaped by the rules set by the media, at the same time they use the same media to increase their popularity, personalise their message and recontextualise other media discourse.



Thus, given the circularity of the mediation process, I have chosen to consider the interactions between political actors, the media and the public as the focus where discourses are generated.

Following Chadwick (2017)'s theory of *the media hybrid system*, I sampled texts from various media, such as Facebook posts, newspaper articles, YouTube and blog contents. Chadwick (2017) has demonstrated how the technologies, genres, norms, behaviours, and organizational forms of older and newer media have often been deeply intertwined. Moving from the assumption that the development of new media is about the negotiation of social issues as “who is inside and outside, who may speak, who may not, and who has authority and may be believed” (Marvin 1988, p. 4, in Chadwick, 2017, p. 29), Chadwick revisits Latour's ideas and concludes that this negotiation involves hybrid networks where social and technological entities interact, generating power and agency. Researching a hybrid media system implies the inclusion of older and new media in the same unit of analysis because “any medium is best understood in terms of its position in a system of interdependent relationships with other media” (p. 29)

In particular, Facebook is the most used social media in Italy. Out of 43 million Internet users, in Italy there are 34 million social media users and 34 million active monthly users of Facebook. It is possible to infer that social media users are almost all also Facebook users (Mazzoleni et al., 2018). Furthermore, all principal Italian politicians have a Facebook page.

Finally, there is an “elective affinity” between populism<sup>20</sup> and social media (Bobba, 2019, Gerbaudo, 2018, Mazzoleni et al., 2018), due to the processes of interactivity,

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disintermediation and immediacy which they ensure. Mazzoleni et al. (2018) point out that typical of a hybrid media environment is a hyper-mediatized populist communication, where populist communicators exploit the disintermediate nature of social media to offset hostile coverage by mainstream media and to maintain direct contact and intense dialogue with their constituencies.

The texts have been selected following the purposive sampling method within the time frame from the 20<sup>th</sup> August, when the asylum seekers arrived at the port of Catania, to the 27<sup>th</sup> August, the day after their disembarkation was authorised. Purposive sampling involves an iterative process of strategic selection of the analytical units based on the observation of themes, concepts and indicators (Schutt, 2018, Bryman, 2012). Purposive sampling is oriented by the research question at the core of the project. My goal was to map out all the discourses which were generated around the Diciotti case, trying to gather as many different viewpoints as possible without any preconceived judgment. Texts have been chosen on the basis of the new perspective offered, while exclusion was decided when a source could not provide new insights. I adopted the criteria of the data saturation to decide if including in the analysis a new text or not. I considered the sample complete when I verified that no new meanings emerged from the texts.

#### **4.1.5 Method of analysis**

I opted not to adhere strictly to a single method. Rather, I preferred to draw on a variety of theoretical and methodological resources, which I hope to show to be consistent with each other, for two reasons. The first concerns the heterogeneous nature of the data I collected. The sources I examined comprise political speeches, newspaper articles, Facebook posts and broadcasts and images. While I consider all

of these as part of a dialogical network, they present different features in terms of text length, form, structure, and rhetorical strategies used.

The other reason which influenced my methodological choices was the need to avoid unnecessary dichotomies, such as those between individual and society, textual and material, cognitive and discursive, which are reproduced by cognitive as well as by discursive approaches. Following Capdevila and Callaghan (2008), I would argue that making an explicit statement of allegiance to a particular methodological and theoretical tradition can result in a restriction of the theorization to a particular “level of analysis”, with the effect of re-inscribing these boundaries (micro/macro, discursive/material, etc.). In Capdevila and Callaghan’s words, “a methodological process that constructs a pre-given category pre-set the criteria by which ‘racism’ can be identified and fixes the ‘level of analysis’ at which it can be studied risks ignoring the multiple points of contact at which ‘racism’ can be made visible or made it to disappear” (2008, p. 1). Furthermore, while traditional methodologies, whether cognitively or discursively shaped, do not avoid dichotomization, a “Hegelian type analysis” (Capdevila and Callaghan, 2008, p. 2) which draws on the notion of dialectics and attempts a synthesis of the two levels of analysis, does not offer a valid alternative either. The argument that “macro” social issues, such as racism, can be studied through microanalysis has been put forward by authors like Baxter (2004), Gee (2005), Fairclough (1992), Van Dijk (2001, 2004), who stress how texts embody contexts and ideologies. However, while there is no doubt that macro issues are enacted within “micro-contexts”, the drawback of these approaches is that there is little engagement with the relationalities between wider contexts and the communications under analysis (Capdevila and Callaghan, 2007).

#### 4.1.5.1 Foucault, personal identity and power relations

Thus, in order not to confine the analysis to a particular level, re-inscribing racism in pre-given categories and limiting the power of analysis, I will be using a Foucauldian discursive analysis (FDA), without seeking a strict adherence to Foucault's writings and without any claims on the ontological status of racism. Rather, my reference to Foucault, here, aims at clarifying the close connection between discourses, practices of legitimization and power, and the constitution of subjectivity. Foucault was, certainly, not alone in pondering the question "how is the self made?" In 1979 cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz challenged the essentialist and a-historical concept of personal identity, writing:

"The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgment and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures." (Geertz, 1979, p. 229, in Shotter and Gergen, 1989, p. 1).

Each society shapes the Ego according to its own culture, and as culture, for Geertz, is primarily made up of symbols, language plays a pivotal role in defining what an individual is. The relation between identity, culture and language has been fruitfully addressed also in the field of social psychology, where much research has been conducted on the stigmatising effects of labelling processes. However, Foucault's specific contribution was to stress that to understand the ways by which, within a

culture, human beings are made subjects, we need to examine these processes in the context of the analysis of power relations (Parker, 1989). Recognizing that social relations are embodied in discourses would not be enough, we must view these relations as power relations, so that instances of social interaction and self-definition can be reworked in “the politically judged patterns of racism, heterosexisms and other forms of domination at work in society” (Parker, 1989, p. 4).

This work relies on Foucault’s idea of power as a series of mechanisms capable of grasping the subject both from within and from without, until their unity is dissolved. Foucault dismantled the monolithic idea of power proposed under Marxism and structuralism. For the French philosopher, power is not conceptualised as the top-down “exercise of the will of an actor over other actors” (Parker, 1989, p. 61), and it cannot simply be reduced to repression. Rather, power is a system based on knowledge and a series of practices that delimit not only what can and what cannot be said, but even what can be thought, and what counts as “the truth”. In other words, power and knowledge are inextricably related, as power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge which define people’s behaviour, ideas, thinking, social reality. These mechanisms of power/knowledge can be distinguished, with a good degree of simplification, into *disciplinary* and *confessional*. The former exerts its grip on the individual from the outside, by constructing discursively what is normal” and disciplining the individual. The latter refers to a mechanism internal to individuals, that acts as a “continuous incitement to discourse and to truth” (Foucault, 1978, p. 56).

While the production of the subject is linked to various technologies of power and historically situated discourses, the unity of the self is put into question. For Foucault, selves should not be seen as “parts” selected at will but as a set in a variety of power-infused discourses which we do not rationally choose to display. Whether the self is fragmented, crossed and built by different discourses, then we are authorised to look at discourse analysis as a reconstruction of fragments of subjectivity in different, contradictory discourses. The idea of the self as made up of parts that are reflected in different discourses combines well with Jung’s theory of the mind. Jung challenged the idea of the unity of the self in a more radical way than Freudian psychoanalysis had previously done. According to his complex theory, the Ego is only one of the many complexes that make up the psyche, and with respect to these it has the only advantage of a greater continuity. As will be discussed later, the two theories can be fruitfully combined. While Jung’s model of the mind offers a perspective of the self which in Foucault is merely historical, Foucauldian concepts introduce the issue of power-relationships and social constraints which limit the possibilities in which the self can develop.

Finally, Foucault’s method of genealogical investigation provides a critique of psychology as a distinct discipline, making his theory an ideal framework for the analysis of medical discourses on refugees and narratives of trauma. Foucault sees the birth of Western psychology more as a matter of administration of social life and reorganisation of political power in Western societies, rather than a “unified programme of ideas and theories” (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008, p. 111). Psychology, as well as other human sciences, is seen by him as tightly interwoven with contemporary power structures which takes the subject from within. Indeed, an

ever-expanding array of confessional techniques, born in the context of pastoral power/care, have been secularised and placed within the domain of the social sciences.

#### **4.1.5.2 Foucauldian Discursive Analysis (FDA)**

It is well known that there is no set of rules for conducting Foucauldian analysis and that, indeed, it resists formalisation. First, because Foucault's work is not consistent enough as to extract a method from it (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008). The ideas and methods employed by Foucault changed in relation to the problems he worked on, as it will become evident whether we compare his study on madness with his works on sexuality or those on the ethics of subjectivity. Another difficulty is constituted by Foucault's style of writing, which is elusive and elliptical, making it hard to translate his ideas into clear procedures to be applied (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008).

Having said that, in this paragraph I will try to give a more accurate description of my analytical approach. As mentioned, I am not seeking a strict adherence to Foucault's writings but, following his concepts of power and of genealogy, I will be focusing on the role played by discourses in constructing psychological and sociological realities, in developing subject positions, and in legitimising power relations. FDA is one of the approaches of Discursive Analysis which Woofitt (2005) defined "top-down", as opposed to those he labelled as "bottom-up". The difference between the two lies in the different stance taken on what can be analysed outside the interaction/language. Top-down approaches focus on the macro-level of the societal and cultural discourses and on the wider context. A more accurate description of how

I will be dealing with the sources to allow macro-level discourses to emerge is offered below.

In concrete terms, in the course of my analysis I will pay special attention to the cultural and social contexts where the texts were produced, with a particular focus on “who” wrote and published them. The production process of the material will be further explored by presenting additional information on the “producer”. For instance, when analysing newspaper articles, the political position of the newspaper will be considered, as well as its affiliation with other organisations and its target audience. In addition to establishing the background of the sources, further attention will be given to the medium and the genre of the texts. Since I am using on-line material, texts will often be, complemented by comments, pictures, links, multi-media content, all features which contribute to frame their meanings and therefore need to be included in the analysis. As I am analysing different kinds of texts (i.e. interviews, articles, TV broadcasts), I will acknowledge the genre each source belongs to, assessing the genre-specific mechanism it deploys to get its message across.

Having assessed the material according to these criteria, I will try to identify what is talked about in the texts, a process that is usually referred to as “coding”. A few words need to be spent to clarify my coding process. When analysing sources from a top-down perspective, researchers apply a deductive approach which implies a reliance on a set of pre-given categories based on their knowledge of the topic and a review of the secondary literature. Although, I certainly had some key themes in mind when I considered the data, deriving mainly from my literature review, I kept my analysis as open-ended as possible. This is because my aim was to map out the different



discourses that permeated the public sphere on the Diciotti Case, examining how they shape refugees' identities. It was clear to me, even just at a first glance, that there were discourses which, rather than directly addressing the plight of a group of involuntarily displaced individuals, constituted instead part of a discursive strategy aimed at reinforcing hostility towards them or, on the opposite side of the spectrum, at mitigating it. In order to detect these discourses and their interrelation with those clearly related to refugees, it was necessary to adopt a more inductive approach.

The need to counterbalance the shortcomings of "top-down" approaches by employing "bottom-up" ones has already been noted (Wetherell, 1998; Buds *et al.*, 2014). Buds *et al.*, (2014), for instance, argued that FDA does not account for people's agency. Social actors are essentially seen as passive users of discourses, allowing no recognition of the ways in which people negotiate their talks in a specific context. Some authors have counteracted these limits by adopting a combined approach called "Critical Discursive Psychology" (Buds *et al.*, 2014; Edley, 2001; Gray Brunton, McVittie, Ellison and Willock, 2014), which brings together FDA and Discursive Psychology. In this work, a more inductive approach is recognizable in my focus on how different discourses interact with each other in the context of the Diciotti Case, starting from the analysis of linguistic functions.

Among the analytic tools which will be employed are the "conventional discourses" drafted by Claudia Strauss (2012). The notion of conventional discourse is not in contradiction with the concept of discourse in Foucauldian terms, as underlined by Strauss herself. According to Foucault, discourses articulate broad ideologies, unify knowledge and practices, and construct personalities and identities. Strauss's conventional discourses express specific schema, influence people, rather than construct them, but are, at the same time, shaped and interpreted by social actors. A

single discursive framework in Foucault's sense can offer the taken for granted background in which several conventional discourses can be located. Speaking of the competing immigration discourses identified during her research, Strauss pointed out that these all relied on the wider assumption that the world is divided into nation-states with borders: "the discursive power of nation-state, in Foucault's sense, constrained the realm of debatable conventional discourses (Strauss, 2012, p. 19)". It is possible to infer that while a discourse in Foucault's terms, constrains the realm of debatable conventional discourses (Strauss, 2012 p. 19), these, in turn, facilitate the structuring of a wider Foucauldian discursive framework.

As I will discuss in the next paragraph, I do not share the epistemology underpinning Strauss's cognitive approach. The model of individual mind and of *affect* employed in this work draw on Jungian analytical psychology. Therefore, I need to clarify how and why I will be using Strauss's conventional discourses. Standardised discourses are underpinned by cognitive schemas that social actors share, but that they can also select, combine and interpret in creative ways. This is because the method of discourse analysis developed by Strauss has the merit of focusing on explicit cultural models which are mental models through which human realities are constructed and interpreted (D'Andrade and Strauss, 1992). As she says: "the cultural model behind each conventional discourse simplifies an issue, focusing on certain aspects of the situation and ignoring others. For example, [...] The Foreigners Taking Our Jobs conventional discourse about immigration stresses job competition, unlike the Help Our Own First conventional discourse, which stresses competition for government benefits" (p. 60). However, I believe that it would be misleading to assign to social actors the levels of agency she assigns to them, albeit within the boundaries set by broader systems of knowledge and practice. I think that she is correct in noting some

often repeated schemas in discourses, but I would conceptualise them as personal and cultural complexes. Especially with reference to political communication, I suggest that uttering a conventional discourse, perhaps by using a catchphrase, can constellate a personal and cultural complex. When discussing the word association test, indeed, Jung highlighted that the habitual use of the same words can flag a disturbance, namely, revealing the existence of a complex (Tavistock Lecture II, CW18, pars- 97-106). The concept of complex has two advantages. First, it introduces the dimension of the *affect* in discourses because complexes, either personal or cultural, are emotionally charged. Second, as mentioned in paragraph 4.1.2, it offers a more dynamic model of relation between individual and social environment, allowing a combination of the role of the latter and the agency of the former.

#### **4.1.5.3 Psychoanalytic approach**

Foucault identifies a “double bind” affecting self-understanding, which on one hand renders us individually responsible for social processes and, on the other, implicates us in the reproduction of relations of domination. However, Foucauldian discourses do not offer a theory of subjectivity. Although Foucault sometimes alluded to “the soul as inner life of the subject of power” (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008, p. 112), he was reluctant to ascribe interiority. Discourses provide a set of rules and procedures which explain the local and heterogeneous positions that subjects can occupy, determining how we can speak, write or think about a social object or practice. In other words, positions are “historical delimitations of what is sayable, thinkable and practicable” (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, p. 112). The subject is

the epiphenomenon of power/knowledge relations, and it is not assimilable to either a role or an individual, but rather to “a multiplicity of positions which are contradictory and discontinuous” (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, p. 112).

However, I find this position problematic. First, as pointed out by Henriques *et al.* (1984), the continuity between the subject and the subjective experience of identity remains unexplained. Second, since according to constructionism there are no pre-given categories to understand the social world, social actors cannot be seen as external to the concepts employed to describe it, but rather they influence these concepts. In other words, as pointed out by Bryman, “social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. This implies first, that social phenomena are not only produced through social interaction but are in a constant state of revision” (Bryman, 2021 p. 86). Second, that the role played by social actors in this dynamic cannot be seen as irrelevant and left out. Third, I would also argue that it is still important not to neglect the role of individual minds, if we want to understand how meanings are constructed and transmitted. One of the reasons to support this point is that a credible method to analyse discourses should take into consideration the possibility to adequately answer the following question: why do some discourses become more gripping to social actors than others? The question is not new: D’Andrade and Strauss (1992), for instance, formulated it in these terms:

Knowing the dominant ideologies, discourses and symbols of a society is only the beginning – there remains the hard work of understanding why some of those ideologies, discourses and symbols become compelling to social actors, while others are only the hollow shell of a morality that might be repeated in official pronouncement, but it is ignored in private lives. Our key question thus becomes: How do cultural messages get under people’s skin (both literally and metaphorically?) (p. 1).

Compared to D' Andrade and Strauss, whose work falls into schema theory, I take a different stance. I believe that psychoanalysis, and in particular Jungian analytical psychology, can offer a fruitful perspective on the relationship between the individual and society. While the application of psychoanalytic theories to wider issues always needs to be justified, following Craib (1989), I will suggest that these are relevant in the context of my research. Despite the scepticism with which psychoanalysis is usually regarded outside the therapeutic setting, there are at least two reasons to consider it useful in conducting a discourse analysis. I am not suggesting falling in any form of psychological reductionism. Social phenomena have, obviously, an existence of their own, "over and above individuals" (Craib, 1989p. 1), with language – the subject of our analysis – being the most obvious example of that. However, the following two points shall be considered. First, in trying to understand social organisation and processes, an understanding of how the individual psyche is constructed and operates is essential. Second, and more importantly for this work, while sociology emphasises the rational and cognitive aspects of human behaviour, psychodynamic psychological approaches, which presuppose the concept of the unconscious in their theoretical model, offer a framework to account for the complexity and conflict of people's emotional lives and for "the irrational, the 'crazy' side of human life" (Craib, 1989, p. 3). This seems even truer to me when we consider issues such as racism and ethnic hatred. As pointed out by Clarke (2003), sociological explanations of racism focus on social structures and how these can facilitate discriminatory practices and hierarchies of inequality. However, this approach fails to explain a number of things: first, the ubiquity of discrimination; second, the affective component of hatred and the visceral and embodied nature of racism; third,

the eruptive feature of racism, which leads communities that used to coexist in harmony to suddenly hate one another. Psychoanalysis can help to understand the psychological mechanisms responsible for the sudden eruption of hatred and conflict by attempting to understand the psychological structures of discrimination. Both psychological and socio-structural factors need to be taken into account to improve our understanding of racism. As stated by Clarke (2003):

Sociologists are very good at explaining how discrimination arises but not why, affect is left in the sociological cupboard. I believe that there is a complex interrelationship between socio-structural and psychological factors; both need to be addressed in parallel if we are to understand the ubiquity and visceral elements of racism (p. 3).

#### **4.1.5.4 Psychoanalysis and Social Theory**

It cannot be ignored, indeed, that psychoanalysis has often been considered with scepticism outside the therapeutic setting, especially by sociologists, who see the use of psychoanalysis as “something which has to be justified” (Craib, 1989, p. 2). It is certain that, as argued by Craib (1989), while numerous endeavours have been made to bring the insights of social theory and psychoanalysis together, many of these have resulted in forms of either psychological or sociological reductionism. As argued by Craib, some attempts to construct a social theory based on Freud’s instinct or drive theory made the mistake of underestimating the importance of social processes and structures that do not originate in unconscious or conscious psychological processes. Such criticism is aimed, for instance, at Badcock’s *The Psychoanalysis of Culture and Madness and Modernity*, but, to a different extent, also at the far more

authoritative works by Herbert Marcuse *Eros and Civilization*, and Lacan's theoretical framework. For Craib, Marcuse's works on general social processes operate at too abstract a level. Concrete social and human relations are lost from sight, as well as gender or ethnic differences between individuals. Talking about Lacan, Craib (1989) argues that there is a tendency, especially from part of the French psychoanalyst's followers, to conceive individuals "as simply a social product" (p. 135). While it is not a goal of this research to offer a critical synthesis of the different ways in which psychoanalysis and sociology have been combined, I believe that Jungian analytical psychology contains within itself valid resources to look at the individual and the environment, while avoiding both psychological and sociological reductionism.

#### **4.1.5.5 Jungian analytical psychology**

In this paragraph, I will be proposing that among the many psychoanalytical approaches developed during the evolution of the discipline, Jungian analytical psychology is particularly suitable to deal with the complex socio-political issues which characterise contemporary Western societies, including migration and asylum. For a long time, the huge potential of analytic psychology to act as an effective analytic tool to address the social and political dimensions has been stressed by relevant academics and analytical psychologists such as Andrew S. (1985), Carta (2010) and Papadopoulos (2009; 2011; 2013), who insisted on the need to extend the scope of analytical psychology beyond the consulting room and developed Jungian theories further in order to adapt them to the socio-political realm. In this paragraph,

I will be outlining the main aspects which make this a fruitful approach to investigate the construction and reproduction of otherness in the social world with particular reference to asylum seekers and refugees.

In his attempt to analyse the basic Jungian model in light of the recent transformation of Italian society and culture into multi-ethnic realities, Stefano Carta (2010) highlights the potential for analytical psychology to provide a meaningful therapeutic framework for the healing of the “other”. I am particularly interested in two of Carta’s points: the Jungian concept of *symbol* and the primary role of culture in Jung’s model; and Jung’s constructionist approach to consciousness.

The Jungian concept of *symbol* and the primary role of culture in Jungian theoretical model. In Jung’s psychological paradigm, culture does not occupy a secondary role; quite the opposite, it is central to his conception of psychic life. To better illustrate this point, it might be useful to compare Freud’s and Jung’s ideas of the psyche. As it is well known, Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian analytical psychology move from different epistemological assumptions. What is generally less recognized is the fact that these differences did not develop over time but, as Papadopoulos (2009) convincingly argued, were clearly defined since the beginning of their relationship.

It is well known that Freud endeavoured to give psychoanalysis the character and method of the exact sciences. Explaining the internal organization of the psyche, Freud wrote:

“Our hypothesis of a spatially extended psychic apparatus, composed of several parts responding to an end, developed by the needs of life, an apparatus which in some points and under certain conditions gives rise to the phenomenon of consciousness, this hypothesis has put us in the condition to be able to build psychology on a foundation similar to that of any other science of nature, such as physics.”(1938a, p. 623)



As noted by Galimberti (2007), this quote makes clear the influence of nineteenth century physicalist psychology on Freud's model of the psychic apparatus. Although it developed over time, the model of the internal organization of the psyche would remain characterised by the influence of the mid-nineteenth century paradigm, according to which psychological investigation should investigate only those phenomena which are objectively observable, can be analysed through the experimental method, and can be interpreted within the stimulus-response scheme – for example, people's behaviour. As a consequence of his awe for the exact sciences and the experimental method, Freud created a model of the mind based on drives, suggesting that he considered biology as representing a sort of "ultimate reality" of the human essence (Carta, 2010, p. 100). The symptom or, in general, any psychic manifestation is, in this perspective, the epiphenomenal manifestation of structures underlying the consciousness and finding their ultimate origin in biology. The psychic phenomenon can therefore be explained by reconnecting it to its ultimate causes, within a causal-reductive epistemology. The psychic function should therefore be understood within a non-symbolic and a-historical theoretical framework. As Carta (2015) correctly points out, within a Freudian paradigm culture occupies a secondary role, as a defensive formation; culture and religion lose their symbolic character and degenerate into signs "that hide and allude to a sort of mute biological *ipsissima res*" (p. 100). Culture, and more in general symbols are intended as a masking of biological forces, the drives "which move something that resembles a complex human automaton, and which are supposed to represent the ultimate *reality*" (Carta, 2010, p. 100).

In Jung's paradigm, conversely, the role of culture is primary. For Jung, psychic life is an intrinsically cultural process, because the nature of the psyche is symbolic.

Between the psyche and the symbol there is no “difference of texture”, and in *The Philosophical Tree* Jung defines the symbol not simply as an image but as the *essence* of psychic energy. It is worth reminding what a symbol is for Jung. Jung clearly distinguishes between allegory, sign and symbol. “Allegory” and “sign” define known things. An allegory is a conception that defines symbolic expression as an intentional circulation or modification of a known thing. Similarly, the sign is a proposed expression for a known thing. But the symbol is “a conception that defines the symbolic expression as the best possible, and therefore as the clearest and most characteristic formulation that can be stated for the moment, of something relatively unknown” (Jacobi, 2004, p. 96). The symbol, then, belongs to the world of meaning, while the sign belongs to the physical world. The symbol is therefore the image of a content that for the most part transcends consciousness, it is the expression of something that cannot be better characterized, at least as long as the symbol is alive. The other aspect of Jung’s model I am interested in is his constructionist approach to consciousness. Jung’s theological approach to phenomena is coherent with one of the assumptions of post-structuralism within which this research moves: a suspicion towards the possibility of imparting causality to discourses even when we still believe in their productive power.

Also, it can help explain the process of *Interpellation*. Weldes, (1999) defines interpellation as “the process through which these discourses create subject positions for individuals to identify with and to ‘speak from’. One is *interpellated* or called into subject position: a subject position is specified and the subject fulfils it.” (Weldes, 1999, p. 163 in Dunn and Neumann, 2016 p. 50). Jung’s discourses and accept them as natural and accurate, producing their social world.

## 4.2 Ethics statement

Without any doubt, ethics is of pivotal importance when conducting any research, and especially social research “(...) that involves people or their data” (Boddy, 2016, p. 204). Respect for ethical principles is essential to protect both participants *and* researchers, and to produce reliable and valid findings (Boddy, 2016). However, as we try to adhere to a given set of ethical principles during the process of research, doubts and contradictions can greatly exceed what previously seemed adamantine certainties. In this paragraph, I will be outlining some of the fundamentals which oriented my thinking.

While, as rule of thumb, it is advisable that researchers carefully evaluate, step by step, whether their choices follow ethical principles, I choose to refer to a *valued-based* ethics as an alternative approach to a *principle-based* ethics. It has been observed that a principle-based ethics is not suitable to face all the dilemmas and ethical tensions that might arise during the work, especially when it comes to qualitative methods. Qualitative research does not easily fit with the same set of principles devised, for example, in the context of bio-medical research and based on positivist experimental paradigms (Boddy, 2016). A principle-based ethics framework appears inadequate to respond to all the strivings that arise from the “fluidity and inductive uncertainty” (Birch *et al.*, 2012, p. 1) which characterize research conducted with qualitative methods. Doucet and Mauthner (2012) and Wiles (2013) claim that situated ethics, namely an approach that focuses on the specifics of the research context, is better equipped to address the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched, in addition to the ethical dilemmas which might

emerge during data collection and fieldwork. Boddy (2016) summarises the discussion suggesting that the adoption of a *value-based ethics*, or an *ethics of care*, based on the recognition of the researcher's responsibility towards the participants and the wider community to which they belong, is more adequate when researching a vulnerable population.

Researching refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) – certainly among the most vulnerable groups – raises specific ethical complexities which have been addressed by several scholars over a long period of time. (Among others, Allotay and Manderson, 2003; Hynes, 2003; Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Landau and Jacobsen, 2004; Leaning, 2001; McKenzie *et al.*, 2007; Zwi *et al.*, 2006.) Major critical issues identified are a lack of recognition of the strengths and resilience of the refugees, leading to their further disempowering (Zwi *et al.*), and the reproduction of their traumatic experience within the context of the research relationship (De Haene *et al.*, 2012).

In order to avoid the risk of undertaking unethical and potentially exploitative research, in the framework of a *valued-based ethics* it has been argued that researchers should move beyond the principle of “harm minimization” to design, instead, projects that aim at bringing about benefits for refugees. (McKenzie C., *et al.*, 2007).

I kept this consideration in mind when I formulated my research question. The assumption of this research is that the discourses on refugees that permeate the public sphere create a network of themes and meanings from which the individuals can escape only with great difficulty. This does not simply apply to public opinion but

also to operators in the sector and to those in charge of designing policies and services for refugees and IDPs.

With this research I aim to contribute to developing a greater awareness of the powerful effects that public discourses have on our freedom to think, feel and evaluate when it comes to refugees. If it is true that we do not speak, but are spoken by Language (Lacan, 1966), I hope that increasing our understanding of the constraints which limit our perceptions and actions, can improve the effectiveness of the assistance we provide to refugees and the quality of the human relationships we establish with others where by “others” we intend both refugees and people who do not share their background and experiences.

#### **4.2.1 Ethics and online research**

It has been observed how new ethical challenges emerge as new research methodology develops (Boddy, 2016). Digital and online research represents one of those methodological innovations that have imposed a rethinking of ethical guidelines. While internet research often raises complex issues about ethics, the major issues in reference to this work were informed consent and anonymity. The data I focused on were generated before my analysis started, which made it unfeasible to ask for and obtain consent. However, the dilemma posed by the internet – which is to decide what is public and what is private – still needed to be addressed. The decisive factor in this case is represented by the expectations of the users. As suggested by Bryman (2021), when investigating public pages, consent is not considered necessary. On the other hand, when the authors’ expectations are that the contents

will not transmigrate outside a small circle of people, consent needs to be obtained. The vast majority of texts I have used belongs to public figures whose contents are aimed at a large audience, therefore, neither consent nor data anonymisation were required. However, when I focused on Facebook posts by people who did not write as representatives of an organisation, but as private citizens, addressing their private circle of Facebook contacts, I asked for their consent. Data were anonymised using a “bricolage approach” (Bryman, 2021, p. 115), i.e. modifying portions of the original post while maintaining the original intent of the text.

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## V

# The “Diciotti case”

### 5. The “Diciotti case”: a summary of the events

On the 16<sup>th</sup> August 2018<sup>th</sup> an Italian patrol boat named “Ubaldo Diciotti” rescued 190 people off to the coast of Lampedusa, as required by International treaties and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The castaways included ten women and thirty-seven minors.

The Italian authority had been aware of the presence of a ship in distress since August 14<sup>th</sup>, but as the ship was in the Maltese search and rescue zone (S.A.R zone), they had expected Malta to intervene. The Maltese government, however, has not signed international treaties such as S.A.R and S.O.L.A.S conventions, and seldom offers assistance to the boats in distress in its waters.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> August at 4 am, the ship had begun to take on water, therefore, the Italian coast guard decided to start the rescue operations by sending the “Ubaldo Diciotti” to assist the shipwrecked. Thirteen persons were immediately evacuated and transferred to Lampedusa due to their poor health. The rest of the castaways were transported to Catania where they arrived, however, only on the 20<sup>th</sup> August, following a few days of negotiations between Italy and Malta regarding where the

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ship should dock. In fact, according to International laws, a rescue is concluded only when the ship disembarks in a place of safety in the shortest possible time, therefore, Italy wanted Malta to be the safe harbour. Malta did not authorise the ship to disembark, claiming that an Italian military boat is *de facto* Italian territory, and, therefore, Italy was the country responsible for examining asylum seekers' application, in force of Dublin regulation.

Upon their arrival in Catania, the Minister of Interior and vice prime minister, Matteo Salvini forbid the castaways from disembarking, claiming that Italy was not willing to take charge of the migrants on the Diciotti ship. Though well aware that a permanent agreement on relocations was not in force at that time, he urged E.U to 'relocate' the survivors in one of its states.

Following this action, the Agrigento prosecutor investigated Minister Salvini and his chief of staff Matteo Piantedosi for kidnapping, abuse of office, omission of acts of office and illegal arrest. Migrants were only authorised to disembark on the 26<sup>th</sup> August at midnight.

Matteo Salvini was accused of 'ministerial crime', one committed while carrying out his functions as Minister, and to be judged by the Ministers' Court, the competent authority. At the end of October, Carmelo Zuccaro, Procurator of Catania, asked the Ministerial Court of Catania to dismiss the proceeding against Matteo Salvini, claiming the delay in disembarking the migrants was motivated by a political decision that cannot be scrutinised by judges, in accordance with the principle of the separation between executive and judicial powers. However, the Ministerial Court refused to close this case, having established Matteo Salvini's clear intention of depriving the migrants' on board the Diciotti of their personal freedom,.



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It is worth noting that Salvini's media activity played a key role in the Court's decision not to close the case. The Ministerial Court's resolution, in fact, was based not only on the statements made by the interior ministry's most senior administrative representatives but also on those made by Salvini himself to the press during the days preceding and following the berth of the ship in Catania. This confirms the value of his Facebook posts, and of his statements to the press, as sources of analysis.

To fully understand Salvini's discursive rhetoric and identify the subtler meanings of his texts, it is necessary to place his discourses within the broader framework of his government actions and political strategy. Equally, his positioning should be viewed in the light of the debate on the reform of the Dublin Regulation<sup>1</sup> that was being carried out in the E.U in that period.

Reforming the Dublin Regulation was one binding point of the so called "government contract", a sort of political program co-signed by the two political parties, '*Lega*' and '*Movimento 5 Stelle*' that ruled Italy from the 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018 to the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The government contract refers to the principle of the fair sharing of responsibilities enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the E.U. The two parties agreed that, in compliance to this principle, a system of automatic relocation of asylum seekers, based on objective and quantifiable parameters, should be requested to E.U and implemented.

On June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018, few months before blocking the landing of the migrants on the Diciotti ship, the Interior ministers of the E.U's member states met in Luxemburg to discuss a draft reform of the Dublin III Regulation proposed by Bulgaria, chair of the European Council. The draft was more conservative than the one approved by European parliament on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2017, as it did not include binding quotas,

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and allowed states to adopt alternative measures to reception, including paying an agreed sum to E.U for each asylum seeker they refuse to take in. It did still contain important changes, as a system of mandatory relocation and burden sharing, in case of huge crises. Though not happy, Greece, Malta and Cyprus, left the door open to negotiation, while the minister of Interior Matteo Salvini rejected the Bulgarian proposal, moving closer to the position the group of Visegrád countries - Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland - that had been always hostiles to any form of redistribution of asylum seekers.

While admitting that the Bulgarian proposal did not respond to Italian requests Salvini' s clear refusal of it was still surprising. The project presented by Bulgaria did not include a compulsory relocation mechanism and a defined quota of refugees to be relocated in each European country, but it still it provided for a quota system with voluntary participation of member countries, and in some cases, it envisaged a system of mandatory relocation It is even more surprising considering that he knew that at the end of June, the mandate of the presidency of Bulgaria would have expired, making way to Austria, notoriously contrary to any form of mandatory resettlements.

The Visegrád countries had already opposed the more radical reform, eliminating 'the first entry' criterion, previously proposed by the European parliament. According to some observers, this position, apparently contradictory, obeys domestic political reasons. Gianfranco Schiavone, member of Association for Legal Studies on Migration (A.S.G.I) has commented that, eliminating the principle of ' the first entry' "[...] takes away from them the main weapon on which they hold their political consensus, the construction of walls, the logic of invasion and defence from invasion"<sup>1</sup>.The principle of sharing responsibilities according to a quota system

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breaks down this logic. According to Schiavone, Salvini's opposition went against national interest and was motivated by his desire to support Orban's extreme right party. A similar opinion was expressed by the MEP of "Possible", Elly Schlein who, after criticising Salvini's absence from negotiations, suggested he did not want to oppose Viktor Orban, his ally on many issues, but in so doing, he went against the interest of Italy. The next section will be dedicated to texts analysis.

## 5.1 Texts

In this section, I will analyse a corpus of 30 texts, issued in the period between the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> August 2018. Building on Leudar et als. (2008), I argue that these texts form a *dialogical network*, focusing on the theme of the "Diciotti case", and that the cohesion of this network is not solely provided by the thematic homogeneity and the dialogic structure, but also by the activation of an archetypal network, which I will investigate later in in this chapter. I will also analyse a further text, issued in 2020, to introduce a longitudinal perspective, showing how, both, the *dialogical network* and the *Victim Diamond* can evolve in time. The translation of texts is mine and, unless otherwise indicated, the use of the Italics or the bold is also mine.

### 5.1.2 - Day 1 - 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018

#### Text 1.A - Analysis

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In the first text (1A) Giorgia Meloni, by framing the Diciotti case as a security issue accomplishes three goals: construct migration as a threat, delegitimise the government's action, and stigmatise the political stance of the European Union. The discursive practices she employs to achieve these purposes are as follows.

In the first line of her post, Meloni presents two membership categories, those willing Europe to have a pro active stance on immigration and those, perhaps, against this, or not interested enough. By advising the Government on how to force the European Union (E.U) to take its responsibility, she places herself and her party in the first category. At the same same time she use a conditional sentence introduced by "if", and the adverb "really", as implicitly suggesting that the Italian Government might not really be willing, (or able) to negotiate a greater involvement of E.U in the management of 'immigration'. By doing this, she does not openly attack the Government but only, slightly, delegitimises it, framing its stance as ambiguous and potentially collusive with the behaviour of the E.U.

The reason for Meloni's critical portrayal the Italian Government is clear: while her party, *'Fratelli d'Italia'*, is a traditional ally of Salvini's *'Lega'*, at the time of the Diciotti case, she was not part of the government alliance. By positioning the Italian Government as the accomplice of an irresponsible and unsupportive E.U, she presents *'Fratelli d' Italia'* as the only political party able to offers a clear solution to the 'problem of immigration'. What exactly this problem consists of, will be addressed later.

Furthermore, by suggesting that E.U is not doing 'its part on immigration' (1), Meloni achieves two objectives. She constructs migration as a collective problem, requiring everyone to play a part to manage it, and introduces an additional membership

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category, setting apart those who do from those who do not. The mention of one category evokes the other, implicitly.

Also, though Meloni does not state it, she implies that Italy belongs to the first category. The Italian nation, here, includes the speaker - Giorgia Meloni - reminding others – E.U and the government - of their responsibilities. But what does it exactly entail to do one's own part on immigration? She clarifies this in the following line: (2) authorising and implementing a naval blockade off the coast of Libya. The Diciotti case, here, is constructed as an 'exemplifying case', proving a more general approach, promoted by '*Fratelli d'Italia*' from the beginning: the implementation of a naval blockade, as the only measure able to 'stop the invasion of illegal immigrants' (3). Migration is, here, shaped as a menace, through the use of war language, exemplified by words as invasion (3) and naval blockade (2), with involuntary dislocated persons constructed as criminals. The expression "illegal immigrants" (3), indeed, implies that people on the Diciotti ship are outlaws. However, Meloni's stance omits that, by claiming asylum while on an Italian patrol boat, these migrants satisfied the criteria set by the Refugee Convention, and were perfectly legal. Furthermore, they came from Eritrea, a country ruled by a acknowledged dictatorship, a circumstance that made them eligible for asylum.

Evoking a war imagery oversimplifies what was happening on the Diciotti ship, neglecting to address the legal, political and humanitarian dimensions involved in the case. In this simplified picture, where Italy is framed as a country under siege, the *migrants as victims-discourse* is reversed. The real victims are no longer the migrants, stranded on a ship, deprived of personal freedom, but the Italians who are threatened by an invasion (3) from 'illegal migrants', which the E.U., phantasised as distant and indifferent to the fate of Italians, is unwilling to front.

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Here, although not clearly worded, the *E.U as a stepmother* discourse is evoked. While this may appear as a conceptual leap, is a necessary one to allow the researcher to investigate beyond the surface of data and reveal its underlying structures” (Zhao, 2014, pp. 7-8) and move “from expression given to expression given off”<sup>i</sup> (p.8), to identify meaning expressed indirectly. The meaning implied by the first line is that Europe is not playing its part (1), and, therefore, is deaf to the problems of Italy. This interpretation is supported by the fact that one of the programmatic points of the political program presented by the centre-right (*Lega, Forza Italia*) coalition concerns the reduction of ties from Europe, the revision of the European treaties, the reduction of the surplus of Italian annual payments to the EU budget, the prevalence of our Constitution on community law, on German model (recovery of sovereignty), the protection of Italian interests in every location.

In conclusion, Giorgia Meloni uses the Diciotti case as an example to subtly delegitimise Italian government’s actions and to prove the soundness of her political stance on migration, underpinned by the following assumptions:

- 1) Migrants are criminals who are threatening to invade the country.
- 2) Italy is under siege and left alone to manage an emergency.

Meloni’s text relies on opposite self-excluding categories: those who do not their part on immigration and those who do; those who invade Italy and those who are invaded. Immigrants and E.U are included in the former; Italians in the latter. Migrants are phantasized as a threat; E.U as distant, unsupportive and irresponsible; Italians as victims of these actors. The rhetoric employed and the wording of her post - centred on a war vocabulary and the reference to the illegality of migrants –reveals the presence of the *Immigrants as a threat* discourse (in its variant *Immigrants as*

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*criminals*) and the *E.U as stepmother* discourse which evokes images of persecutors and victims. The analysis would not be complete without reminding how Meloni positions herself. While she contributes to raise people fears, she, at the same time, frames herself as the one who can handle them, providing solutions and then, protection. Being the only one who has a clear solution to ‘stop the invasion’, she evokes fantasies of salvation. I suggest here is set up another membership category, that of the saviour.

### **Text 1.B - Analysis**

This text is an interview which was given by Salvini to the TV broadcasting ‘Agorà Estate’ and later posted on his Facebook page on the 20<sup>th</sup> August (text 1B). It provides a reply to Giorgia Meloni’s post, summarising and expanding upon some of points she had raised and, therefore, is clearly connected thematically and syntactically with the text 1A and can be included in the Diciotti case’s dialogical network.

As mentioned, Meloni had positioned herself and her party among those who wanted ‘Europe to do its part’, by suggesting that the position of Italian Government on E.U.’s politic was ambiguous. In a few lines (2), Salvini manages to frame the E.U. as unsupportive and unreliable, migration as a threat, and his party as the only one capable of implementing concrete actions, dispelling the doubts (raised by Meloni), about the government's attitude toward E.U. He achieves this as it follows.

He takes over the *E.U as stepmother* discourse and develops it further by stating the E.U. is not doing its part, because it is ‘promising without keeping’. In acknowledging the work that Italy has carried out alone in so far, and its need for support, the E.U. is only paying

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a lip service to our country (2). Those who are to blame are Merkel and Macron (3), the presidents of the two countries that, according to Salvini, dominate the E.U. The adverb ‘*anche*’ - which can be translated with ‘*also*’- in the statement ‘also in this case we wait to see if facts live up to the words’ (3) implies that the E.U. has already proved to be unreliable. With this wording, Salvini intends to arouse in the listener/reader the feeling of being betrayed and exploited. The adoption of the pronoun ‘we’ in the same line, specifies those that E.U. has betrayed. ‘We’ resonates with ‘Italy’ in the previous line (2), so all Italian citizens. ‘We’ resonates also with ‘our initiative’ in the following line (4), implying that ‘we’ refers to the speaker/author and his allies. By including himself in the ‘we’ category, Salvini identifies the needs and expectations of all Italians with his own, signalling he is like them and is on their side. He expands on the distinction made by Meloni between those who play their part on immigration, the Italians, and those who do not, the E.U., by identifying the characteristics of the members of these distinct categories: the former are the *doers*; the latter are those who pay only a lip service to Italy (. He places himself and his party in the category of the doers, offering the reduction of arrivals as a proof of this (4). The ‘doers’ and ‘those -of do-only in words’ are two opposed categories that, I suggest, evoke two broader opposing and self-excluding categories: the *Us* and the *Them*. In the remaining text, Salvini gradually expands the categories of people included in the *Them*.

Among the *Them*, he includes migrants by resuming the *Immigrants as criminals* discourse voiced by Meloni, enriching it with details. He brings together migration and criminality, by posing as resonant categories the ‘arrivals’, and ‘the business of the smugglers of the mafia’ (4). He, continues by reinforcing this association with the assertion ‘illegal immigration’ (5). Thus. migration is oversimplified and portrayed as another business managed by smugglers, trading drugs and weapons into Italy.



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The journalist counteracts the *Immigrants as criminals* discourse, by arguing that Italy needs to respect the International conventions, and that Salvini's actions are in violation of International binding treaties of which Italy is a signatory country, and, therefore, are unlawful. This argument that will be adopted again by Salvini's political opponents, in my view weakens their case.

My point, is that, for some reasons, they struggle to refer to the ethical principles that were the foundations of those international treaties. This difficulty in referring to, and articulating an ethical principle, may suggest that this element has been lost. But if the ethical principle – one the laws should hypostatise and guard – is lost, what is left is only the legal aspect of the principle. Alone, not supported by ethics, this becomes arbitrary and is regarded as a slogan. For this reason, I analyse the reference to law and international treaties as a conventional discourse, called *Respecting the Convention and International laws*. This discourse is easily counteracted by Salvini because, as mentioned, if not rooted in ethics, international laws can be perceived as arbitrary, as many are the result of historical contexts and political interests. Salvini, in fact, constructs the *Breaking unfair laws* discourse, whose rhetoric scheme relies on the idea that violating unfair rules is ethically right, as laws are just products, of history and, therefore, need to be updated. Of course, the value scheme, evaluating what is fair and what is unfair, is discursively constructed by him. The *Breaking unfair laws* discourse is built on the reference to recent tragedy occurred in Italy, namely the collapse of the Genoa bridge<sup>1</sup>. Salvini equates the need to review the highway concession to 'Autostrade per l'Italia' with the need to review an International human rights convention (8), comparing an administrative act regulating the legitimate interests of public administrations with International conventions intended to protect the subjective rights of people. Though this equation is incorrect, in suggesting it he implies a similarity between the managers of a private company – accused of profiting

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at the expenses of citizens - and the international community as they are both guilty of predating on Italians, have an interest in maintaining the status quo. For this, they are placed in the *Them* category, as enemies of Italians.

Salvini adds that, since the time the treaties were signed, both the world and the 'immigration' have changed (8). He clarifies his point in the same line, by linking the changes occurred in immigration, with those taking place in the business of the mafia, through the adverb "so" (9), and constructing Immigration and Mafia as resonant categories. The interviewer counteracts Salvini's narrative, uttering the *Respecting the Convention and International laws* discourse, to restore dignity to both asylum and refugees (12). He also attempts to counteract the *Immigrants as an economic burden* discourse, by stressing that violating conventions results in an economic burden, as Italy had to repay applicants (13) who are genuine asylum seekers. To support this point, the interviewer adopts another widespread discourse, the one recognising as real refugees those who come from specific countries, including Eritrea and Somalia (14).

Salvini resorts to the *Immigrants as a threat discourse* (14) in its variants *Immigrants as bogus asylum seekers* (15) and *Immigrants as an economic burden* (16).

Finally, in order to justify the stance that Italy should not-longer accept migrants, he suggests that, rather than spending money to support immigrants, payments should be made to the governments of their countries of origin, in line with the rhetoric that immigrants should be helped at their home. This argument – often used in the Italian political debate, but seldom voiced during the Diciotti case – is presented as a strategy to save lives, because as Salvini often repeats as slogan: less departures, fewer landings, less deaths, less waste.

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In the last exchange, Salvini voices again the *E.U as stepmother* discourse, again stressing how Italy gives more than what receives (20), and positioning the E.U. with its penalising of Italians citizens through its indifference, in the *Them* category, while placing the latter as the exploited by the *Them*, in the *Us* category.

### Text 1.C – Analysis

This post, shared by Salvini on his official Facebook-page from the ANSA website, is clearly connected to the previous one. The elements that make clear it belongs to a *dialogical network* which includes Salvini's post on his interview at *Agorà Estate* are analysed below.

The two texts are, clearly, thematically connected. In the statement introducing the post, Salvini uses an antiphrasis (1) to suggest that those whom his left-wing opponents believe need to be integrated are, in fact, terrorists. His argument relies on what is called a hasty generalisation fallacy, the over-generalisation of the behaviour of few individuals to an entire category of people, establishing the false equivalence between migrants and terrorists.

The initial antiphrasis, thus, signposts and stresses the thematic connection between the text 1B and the text 1C. As mentioned, the text 1B had three major objectives: 1) to frame E.U as unsupportive and unreliable, 2) to construct migrants as a threat and 3) to feature his party as the only one able to protect Italians from exploitation and different forms of danger. The text 1 C resumes the theme of *Immigrant as a threat*.

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It is worth noting that Salvini uses this new post to amplify and enrich the semantic core of the theme, by building on the false equivalence ‘all migrants are terrorists’. Thus, migrants, now pose a threat not only for they invade Italy and become an economic burden for Italians, but also for they are terrorists. We shall see later in this paragraph the importance of the reference to the terrorism in the context of the 2018 Europe.

Second, the thematic connection is strengthened by the spatial and temporal proximity between the two posts. The text 1C it was issued on Salvini’s Facebook page immediately after the text 1B. There is no shortage of academic literature on how, in politic, terrorism is often related to migration (Helbling & Meierrieks, 2020). It has been noted that, on the assumption that migrants will engage in terrorist activity, they are framed as a potential threat to domestic security, giving to politicians the excuse to enact increasingly restrictive immigration laws. This is particular true with regard to Muslim immigration after 9/11 which is perceived as a threat to Western countries (Panagopolous 2006; Sides & Gross, 2013). Perceived threat is an explanatory factor of the worsening of attitudes towards migrants in the context of terrorism (Huddy, 2005). The perception of an impending threat of a terrorist attack also heightens fear of the other, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, strengthening, at the same time, ties to native identity, promoting negative attitudes toward migrants (Hellwing & Sinno, 2017; Hitlan, 2007; Levin & Campbell 1972; Schimel 1999). According to Sides & Gross (2013), the investigation of Americans’ stereotypes of Muslims, reveals that “negative stereotypes relating to violence and trustworthiness are commonplace” (p.583).

It is reasonable to suggest that, by evoking the fear of terrorism, Salvini is attempting to increase his electoral support. The perception of a terrorist threat and a worsening

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attitude toward migrants (especially Muslim migrants), can shape, to a certain extent, citizens' electoral preferences, shifting votes toward more conservative parties (Helbling & Meierrieks, 2020). Conversely, some studies seem to indicate that, while prejudices and xenophobia increased in Western nations in the immediate wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Allen & Nielsen, 2002; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006; Sheridan, 2006), their impact was short-lived (Kalkan & Uslaner, 2012, Panagopolous, 2006).

It can be assumed that Salvini is trying to keep alive the fear of terrorism in the consciences of the voters. While Italy has not experienced direct attacks in so far, Italians have witnessed numerous massacres in neighbouring countries<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Text 1.D - Analysis**

This interview has been published by the *Quotidiano Nazionale* (QN), a consortium gathering four historic Italian right-wing newspapers: “*Il Resto del Carlino*”, “*La Nazione*”, “*Il Giorno*”, and “*Il Telegrafo*”.

This piece is structured around Salvini's typical political campaign themes: security, relations with European Union, immigration, the fight against finance bodies and great powers. He arranges these elements in a narration where victims and perpetrators are clearly identified, opposed and organised by the *Us and Them* rhetoric. As we shall see, he positions himself and his allies as capable, competent, honest, able to solve problems, and defend Italians from their ‘enemies’, in a word as the “saviour” of Italians.

The journalist's opening question seems to lay the ground for the construction of Salvini's narrative, addressing the availability of public funds to secure bridges, schools, and modernise the country, ‘after the tragedy in Genoa’ and ‘out of

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commitments with Europe' (3). By bringing into question the existence of proper financial resources out of the European constrains immediately after having mentioned the tragedy in Genoa (3), the journalist implies that Europe plays a role in reducing Italians 'safety', thus, allowing Salvini to voice the *E.U. as stepmother* discourse.

It is worth noting that, sadly, accidents such as the one that occurred in Genoa are not rare exceptions in Italy. This is due to the obsolescence of this country's existing infrastructures and to the failures in complying with the regulations in force, during the design and construction phases of the works. In this context, the extent of the feelings of insecurity and threat in public opinion is understandable. This mood, however, is cleverly exploited by the Italian right wings parties, that have always made the issue of safety as one of their main arguments.

Salvini picks up on the journalist's framing of the collapse of the bridge in Genoa as *a tragedy*, proceeding to identify the victims and the perpetrators of the event. He uses the term "victims" to define the 43 people who lost their lives in the collapse of the bridge, broadening this category to include all Italians (4). The perpetrators are listed in the following line. Among them, first is the State, precisely, the members of previous governments, guilty of having paid public money to private companies, without checking their services properly. Why did the state not check the quality of their work? Because it was negligent, incompetent, and also accomplice of private companies, also grouped among the perpetrators, in other words, corrupt (5). Note that Salvini avoids mentioning the actual company responsible for managing the bridge, speaking in general and in the plural of 'companies', conveying to the common people the message that he is on their side against the "great powers". The attack on great powers is, in fact, a rhetorical device – typical of populist governments

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- with the function to facilitate voters' identification with their leader. Salvini will resort on this strategy later (12).

As Volli (2008) points out, the success of a political representation depends upon the capacity of saying and reconciling these two contradictory statements: 'I can represent you because I am qualified (i.e.,: more qualified than you)' and 'I can represent you because I'm exactly like you.' Here, Salvini is, clearly, adopts the latter stance.

He, then, clearly elaborates upon his first statement, setting the stage for the arrival on the scene of a further character, that of the Rescuer. The pronoun "We" identifying Salvini and his government, is used 4 times (4)(5)(6) in the first 5 lines. This "We" does not identify Salvini and the Italian people together, rather, this new subject places himself in a non- equal relationship with "the subject" the Italian people. The subject identified by "We" is accompanied by verbal predicates, signifying action (4), ability to offer protection (5) (6), and assertiveness (6). While the action of "We" is hindered by E.U., portrayed as an enemy of Italy (9), "We" still ensures that no E.U.'s constrains will threat Italians' safety (10). Here, Renos Papadopoulos' (2020) analysis of the figure of "The Rescuer" seems relevant: "The dictionary reminds us that to rescue means 'to deliver or save (a person or a thing) *from* some evil or harm' (OED). It seems reasonable to conclude that, by adopting the subject "We", Salvini is positioning himself as a Rescuer, protecting Italians from dangerous and hostile enemies as the E.U. (9)(24), Autostrade per l'Italia (12), the 'strong powers' (14) and an unspecified subject indicated through the use of the pronoun 'someone' (14) of the third person plural "They" (14) (16), past governments (23) migrants (19)(20)(21) and leftwing cooperatives (20). Migrants are portrayed as invaders of the country (19), and as an economic burden (20). Furthermore, Salvini counteracts the criminal

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charges moved by his political opponents, by subtly shifting the blame of migrant children's deaths on their parents, responsible of having put them on boats (21).

### 5.1.3 – Day 2 - 21<sup>st</sup> August 2018

#### Text 2.A - Analysis

In this post, Salvini, briefly, outlines his views on migration, stating that the borders need to be defended, and evoking a state of war, as if the country was under a siege. This representation of Italy as a country under attack, is strengthened by the adoption of the pejorative term *immigrants*, instead of the more neutral expression *migrants*, conveying the idea of a shapeless amass of people waiting to enter the country, and conjuring up the image of the invasion. Here, at work, is the *Defending our borders* discourse (1). Migrants are framed as a threat but also as a burden. The reference to relocation (1) conveys a passive image of migrants as a weight that must be shared among all European countries, and that can be sent back as parcels otherwise. Salvini addresses the E.U., accusing it of being careless on immigration, in what seem to suggest the adoption of the *EU as stepmother* discourse. He continues by evoking feelings of intolerance toward migrants and toward E.U., stating that Italians, have tolerated and accepted far too much inconvenience to date (2), thus constructing the *We have already given enough* discourse.



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### Text 2.B - Analysis

Salvini publishes on his FB page an article from the right-wing newspaper *Il Giornale*, reporting the comment of French journal *Le Monde* on the Diciotti Case. His use of the share function on his page had a dual purpose: to highlight contents supporting his political figure and stands, and to re-signify those written by his detractors.

Here, Salvini shares an article from a right-oriented newspaper, supporting his politics, as shown by the way in which *Le Monde* point of view is presented. First of all, the journalist uses words associated with the military lexicon: *Le Mond*, in fact, *attacks* Salvini (7)(10) *brings a lunge* (12) puts the Minister of Interior in the *crosshairs* (12). He stresses that Salvini is not simply the object of criticism by *Le Monde*, but he is, in fact, being unjustly accused and judged as suggested by the use of expressions as *pointing the finger* (11) . The journalist uses a military expression to emphasise Salvini's attitude toward his political opponents as someone who has "targeted Europe and the states that promise acceptance *only in words*" (8). This attitude is framed as fair, because opposes those states failing to maintain their promises. Emerging here, is the anti-European and anti-French sentiment that plays a major role in the debate around the Diciotti case. Salvini takes up and amplifies the anti-French sentiment, by using the word "another" (1), and by suggesting that he is the object of regular attacks by the French press, and by delegitimising the French government.

### Text 2.C - Analysis

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In his post, Roberto Saviano briefly summarises the events relating to the Diciotti case (1). His reconstruction of the facts clearly aims to stress the situation of suspension (and suffering) of the refugees. The ban to disembark the migrants arrives when the Diciotti ship has already been moored for 5 days in the port of Pozzallo (1). Saviano counteracts Salvini's construction of the refugees as *illegal immigrants* (*Immigrants as criminals* discourse), by using the humanitarian rhetoric of *refugees as human beings* (1). The individuals on the Diciotti are, first of all, human beings who are not being treated as such by the Minister of Interior. Furthermore, Saviano clarifies that the Diciotti is a ship of the Italian Coast Guard (1), setting this rescue within a framework of legality, and framing the minister's ban as unlawful, and Salvini as the villain. The request of asylum on a ship of the Italian Coast Guard is the equivalent of the application to international protection in Italy. Saviano discursively constructs the Diciotti case, as *kidnapping* (3), presenting Salvini as the responsible for this (2)(5)(7). Saviano seems to imply that the prosecutor Dr. Zuccaro is colluding with the government, inviting him to investigate Salvini and stating that any inaction from Dr. Zuccaro would signal the absence of a separation between the powers of the state (8), that would *put Italy in a condition of illegality* (8). Saviano frames all government action as *violating the Constitution* (9). This reference to the Constitution is reiterated at the end of the post (11).

### Text 2.D - Analysis

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The position adopted by the journalist of the “Messaggero” seems contrary to the one of government. The journalist presents the individuals on the Diciotti as “refugees” (1), an identity reinforced through the reference to their country of origin, Eritrea (2), internationally recognised as a dictatorial state. However, the journalist fails to openly discuss the current political oppression endured by Eritrean citizens, and to mention the rights recognised by the Refugee Convention to those escaping from dictatorships. Therefore, he does not construct the identity of the refugees it is not through political or legal consideration. Rather, he adopts the noun-adjectives “the desperate” (4) and “the prisoners” (5), as pronouns to refer to the individuals on the Diciotti ship, *victimizing refugees*. The journalist’s references to the minors on board (3) strengthen the victimisation of forced migrants, seeking for empathy from the reader. Among the kidnapped, he includes the crew, composed by Italian military, i.e., individuals representing Italy like the minister of Interior (5), thus, isolating Salvini. As a consequence, Salvini’s ban cannot longer be considered as representing all Italians. The Diciotti case is framed as “a tug of war” with Brussels (4) though the E.U. is presented as a much more collaborative entity (8) than the one made up by the right-wing press. The *Migrants as victims* discourse is at work in this article, with its use of the word ‘prisoners’ that portrays Salvini as a kidnapper. Thus, the *Salvini as a criminal* discourse can be identified here.

#### **5.1.4 - Day 3 - 22 August 2018**

#### **Text 3.A- Analysis**

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Salvini's intent in this post is to delegitimise the prosecutor's enquiries through derision. Salvini adopts a defiant attitude towards the judiciary (2), inviting the Prosecutor's Office to investigate himself rather than "an unknown" (1). In so doing, he polarises the discourse, opposing himself and the judiciary and placing himself above it and conveying a sense of omnipotence. Considering Salvini's key role within the current government, his attitude towards the judiciary can be regarded as *subversive*, as it disrespects the democratic principle of the separation of powers. By adopting the identity of the transgressor, he is also defining the judiciary as a body that, while severe in its criticism of his methods to fight illegality, fails to do its duty, and prosecute the real criminals. Salvini frames migrant as *illegal immigrants*, and his landing ban, as a measure to combat the illegal immigration (3). It follows that violating the law in this case was fair, and he has been *breaking unfair laws*.

If Salvini is trying to stop those who threaten Italians, the judiciary, persecuting him while failing to stop the latter, is construed as an enemy of the Italian people. Thus, his personal persecution is extended to all Italians. Despite the role of the judiciary in putting at risk the safety of the Italian people by persecuting him, Salvini rejects the role the victim and, showing no fear to be arrested, he reassures the reader whose complicity he is actively seeking (4).

### **Text 3.B -Analysis**

Saviano responds to Salvini's post with this text issued just 19 minutes after Salvini's. He acknowledges the Salvini persona as a *subversive* one (1) but positions it within a

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framework of illegality and manipulation of the electorate (2). According to Saviano, Salvini violates the law, seeking to be tried and be able to play the role of the victim, rather than the one of the persecutor he is (2). Referring to an unspecified historical past, Saviano states that victimisation helps gaining the necessary consent, to impose authoritarian policies (3). His reference to Fascism is clear, as Salvini will be /is often compared to Mussolini (see pictures 3-4-5 in the Annex). The Diciotti case, which Saviano had previously framed as kidnapping, is now the *casus belli*, allowing Salvini to play the victim (the fake victim) (4). It should be noted that he objects to Salvini's search for consent, reiterating the need to respect the principles of the Constitutions and resorting to the Respecting the Constitution and the International law discourse (4)(5)(8). In fact, the photo (see the annex) with the banner of the protesters, accompanying the post, contains a sentence that refers to the rhetoric of "*staying human*" (9). Finally, Saviano counteracts Salvini's stereotype of a left elite remote from the people, portraying representatives of the government, enjoying holidays in expensive and exclusive places that would be out of reach for "the 5 millions of poor" (6)

### Text 3.C – Analysis

Salvini's strategy here is to undermine Saviano and his views by using irony (1) and courting the reader's sympathy (2). He does not discuss Saviano's opinions, rather, dismissing them as nonsense. Salvini personalises the public debate by avoiding

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going into the merits of Saviano's ideas and framing the political dispute- arose by the Diciotti case- as a personal issue between he and the journalist and writer.

Salvini also fails to mention, the detention of the Diciotti, and the conditions and legal *status* of the individuals on board.

### **Text 3D-Analysis**

Saviano shares Salvini's previous post and replies to it. Abandoning the title of 'the Minister of Interior' used in previous texts, he addresses Salvini directly (1), making the debate personal. In fact, the subject of the discussion is subtly moving away from Salvini's political action, which is subversive (2) to Salvini himself, as responsible of a criminal action (1) (3) transgressing the limit posed by the Constitution. The discourses voiced are *Salvini as criminal* and *Respecting the Constitution and International laws.*

### **Text 3 E – Analysis**

This text, issued by euro-news in different languages, makes explicit the dynamic punctuating the texts 3B-3C and 3D. It clarifies the polarisation of the interactions of two interlocutors: Matteo Salvini, responsible for the detention of the migrants stranded on the patrol boat, and Roberto Saviano, critical of the work of the Minister of Interior in his advocacy of the rights of migrants. The article summarises the long-distance controversy between the two, defining it as "a tug of war" (2), with the issue of the migrants blocked on board of the Diciotti acting as the "backdrop" against which the conflict takes place. The real focus of this article is the relationship between Salvini and Saviano, rather than the deprivation of freedom of 177 persons. This is

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confirmed by the journalist's acknowledgement that arguments between these two public figures can be traced back in time (6).

### Text 3 F – Analysis

The text 3F is published by fanpage.it, an online newspaper founded in 2010. As, among its most influential journalists it employs exponents of the Italian Democratic Party (PD),<sup>i</sup> it is reasonable to suggest that its political orientation is left –wing.

By juxtaposing the word “blocked” (1) and Possibile’s frames of the case as “kidnapping”, (2) fanpage.it positions itself as against the government initiative. The blockade of the patrol boat is just a crime (2). To support this framing of the event, both the legal legitimacy and the political value of Salvini’s initiative are deconstructed. Stressing the lack of official explanations provided by the Ministry (4), and framing Salvini’s stance against E.U as “unofficial” (14) it undermines the political meaning of the ban of disembarkation. The burden of ensuring legality is reversed, as now it is the commander of the ship who has a ‘legal duty’ to disobey to the criminal ministerial order (6). It is relevant that fanpage.it stresses that the ship is blocked by Salvini (1) (3), as if he were the only agent of the story, while the case is probably the result of a strategy shared by other government actors. In this way, it contributes to personalise the debate, denying it any political dimension, to frame Salvini as a *kidnapper*. The rest of the article confirms the assumptions just mentioned:

The blockade of the Diciotti is incomprehensible (9), unmotivated (10) not supported by any official explanations (11), illegitimate (22). Fanpage.it counteracts the

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'migrants as threat' discourse in two ways: by stressing the absence of reasons of public order or national security that justify the ban (10), by re-framing the theme of the "safety often used by the right-wing rhetoric. Rather than the Italian citizens, those requiring protection are the refugees, and it is the duty of the Ministry to provide them with a safety place (12) because they have been - dutifully (19) - rescued in the Italian SARS area (13). Fanpage.it exposes the Italian authorities neglect of the migrants' security (12) as set out by law (13), positioning migrants as victims, who went through an 'odyssey' (7). The argument that depriving migrants of their freedom without a magistrate's authorisation is illegal (17) (18) (19) should be sufficient to oppose Salvini's political action. However, the 'dose is increased' (20) when Fanpage.it stresses the migrants on board are 'potential asylum seekers' (20) vulnerable (21), traumatised (21) victims of rape (21) ill-treated (21) sick (21) injured (21) in need of care (21). It should be noted that the 'disobey an illegitimate order' (22) asserted by Andrea Maestri, member of the party 'Possibile' reminds the 'breaking unfair laws' used by Salvini's supporters against E.U.'s directives. However, fanpage.it counteracts Salvini's *Breaking unfair laws* discourse by framing his action as illegitimate (19) and his position toward E.U. as unofficial (14). In conclusion, fanpage.it portrays migrants as victims, tortured and powerless, and in need of protection. The individual who, by law, should provide them with safety, is acting illegally and is using them instrumentally (19). Salvini is positioned as a persecutor, who uses migrants as bargain chip to force E.U. to accept his demands. All the article is intended to work as an advocacy of migrants' rights, but it slips from the demand of legal rights to the claim for empathy for people 'who have suffered traumas'. As "advocacy and protection are form of saving" (Papadopoulos, 2020, p.191), fanpage.it and Andrea Maestri are acting as rescuers.



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### **Text 3G - Analysis**

This text reports the controversy between Salvini e Saviano which has been analysed above (3B-3C and 3D, 3E). The article confirms the media resonance and the personalisation of the controversy between the Minister of Interior and the writer. Fanpage.it quotes Saviano's post, reminding the Italian authorities of their responsibilities in banning the disembark without providing explanations (6) and outside of any legal framework (9). The juxtaposition of the photographs of the two protagonists of the controversy reinforces the idea that the focus of the case is on them, rather than on the people stuck on the patrol boat. The article includes Salvini's tweets (which are identical to his Facebook posts), including one against Saviano, and another one in which, as fanpage.it points out, he "makes fool" of the protesters (10) (12) (13) (14)

### **Text 3. H - Analysis**

The theme of the 'invasion' (1) used by Salvini on the same day (22 August, 2018) in one of his Facebook posts is taken up and re-signified in this post from "Baobab experience". "Baobab experience" is a non-profit organisation founded in 2016, to respond to the problems resulting from the intensification of the migration flows to Italy. The organisation offers a range of services to migrants and refugees, relying on a group of volunteers. In the home section of their website, they define themselves as a "group of volunteers and private citizens who, in 2015, found itself facing a

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migratory emergency of about 35,000 migrants passing through the walls of our centre Baobab”<sup>1</sup>(in English in the text). The stress on the involvement of ‘private citizens’ frames the ‘Baobab experience’ as bottom-up born organisation, alternative to the institutions.

As mentioned, Salvini had framed Italy as “INVADED” (capital letters in the text), identifying the invaders in the 700thousands “immigrants”, landed, ‘illegally’. In this text, Italy is still framed as subjected to an invasion, but the roles of ‘the invaders’ and ‘the invaded’ - of the victim and persecutor – are reversed.

It is worth noting that the *Barbarian invasions* (1) is an expression used to indicate a period of irruption and migration of the so called ‘barbaric populations’ (Germanic, Slavic, Sarmatic and other people of Asian origin) within the borders of the Western Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In Italian, a *barbarian invasion* denotes a wild, primitive, and destructive force, something foreign and unstoppable, breaking out from outside, suddenly leading to an economic, cultural, social or other form of regression.

Here, the Barbarian, or the oppressor, is the Minister of Interior, Matteo Salvini (4) whose political action is framed as regressive (3), and as a dangerous game (4), risking to bring Italy back to an era of oppression and legal involution (4). The victims of this oppressor are the refugees, but also the entire institutions of asylum, which have been kidnapped (2). By framing asylum as “kidnapped” and the “immigrants” as “refugees” (2), the author counteracts Salvini’s *Immigrants as threat* discourse in its variant *Immigrants as bogus refugees*, discrediting the institution of asylum. Salvini’s DE -legitimation of asylum is counteracted by an historical recollection (5)(6)(7)(8)(9), stressing the ancient and sacred character of asylum (5), its saving function of protecting powerless individuals in front of more powerful others (6), and

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the historical evolution culminating in the development of a regulatory framework enriching respect for human rights (7)(8). The asylum as result of an evolutionary process, is opposed to Salvini's regressive politic, that is stopping this positive evolution (3). Also, Baobab experience, here, employs the *Us and Them* discourse switching the members of the two opposed categories. Included among the *Us*, are :Baobab experience, migrants, all the Italians, and the asylum. The *Them* includes Salvini and the 'practices of bad reception' (14). The identification between Italians and migrants and their shared identification with the victim position is expressed explicitly by stating that Salvini's "hostages are all of us" (16). It is then suggested that the migrants on the Diciotti and Italians find themselves in the same position: while the formers are stuck in the closed space of the ship and must be freed, the Italians must free themselves from the propaganda and the populist discourses of those in power (16). It is legitimate to wonder: if all of Italy is imprisoned - as the image accompanying the text suggests - who will free it? The implied answer points to those who have the duty to save, namely volunteers and informal organisations (15) like Baobab, guaranteeing the application of the Refugee law with its intrinsic salvific meaning

### **5.1.5- Day 4 - 23 August 2018**

#### **Text 4.A – Analysis**

Salvini gave this interview to RTL 102.5 radio, the most popular Italian broadcaster in 2018 (source TER – Tavolo, Editori, Radio). In 2016, RTL 102.5 acquired the concession belonging to Radio Padana Libera, the Lega no-profit broadcaster.

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Through this acquisition, RTL 102.5 can benefit of some advantages reserved to non-commercial radios, including the access to new free frequency repeaters. It can be suggested that the leader of the Lega is in a friendly environment where he can voice his typical themes.

The interview opens with a reference to the Facebook live broadcast performed by Salvini the day before where his positions have raised much criticism, one he counteracts by delegitimising the credibility of his opponents.

He positions himself as a responsible and caring father, too occupied with looking after his daughter - (also appearing in the direct Facebook) – and after his metaphorical daughter, Italy, to have time to waste to respond to the personal attacks (6), of his political opponents who have been spending their time criticising him, since his appointment as minister. He implies, in this way, that he is being attacked on a personal level, rather than for his political initiatives.

It is easy to recognise in the opposition he builds between him and the others, the *Us and Them* discourse, where components are added to these two categories as the interview progresses. ‘Us’ comes to include, in addition to him, all the Italians (9). Salvini is acting on behalf of them, so his and their stands are one, his actions designed to fulfil their wishes for increased security and order (8). This identification between the leader and his people is supported by the evocation of strong emotions linked not only to the need of safety, but to the broader theme of honour implied in the idea of ‘showing respect if you want respect’ (9). Giving respect means acknowledging someone’s dignity and personality. The term honour “indicates the personal dignity and moral value of a person, not only considered in themselves but also insofar as they attract esteem and respect” (Honour-Treccani). Demanding respect implies that Italians have failed to receive it to date, and conjures up a feeling

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of humiliation and a desire for compensation, embodied in the *Italians first* discourse. Salvini also expands the number of the component parts of the ‘Them’ category, including his political opponents (10) who have let the country to be invaded, the ‘invaders’, qualified through the discourses: *Immigrants as parasites* (11), *Immigrants as bogus refugees* (12), *Immigrants as criminals* (13) (50) (21) (22), *Immigrants as bad parents* (47), the prosecutor (14) (23), and the E.U., qualified as unreliable (39) and betrayer (34), revealing the presence of the *E.U as stepmother* discourse. I said that in the ‘Us’ category, the leader and the Italians are constructed as a unity, though this identification is not stable, as it fluctuates according to Salvini’s discursive interests. In fact, at times, he establishes an unequal relationship with his people, presenting himself as a saviour figure acting as a good father, by uttering the *I am a father* discourse (6) (23) (32), the *Defending our borders* discourse (16) and through the many references to his ability to impose order, respect of laws and to take responsibility for his actions (8) (13) (15).

#### **Text 4.B – Analysis**

This text is an example of what I will indicate as an audience’s intervention in the Victim Diamond, in the next section. The author, Silvio Laviano, is an actor and theatre director from Catania. He does not claim any political affiliation and his initiative – to go the port of Catania to offer an *arancino*<sup>i</sup> to migrants - is framed as born deliberately outside of a party or political logic (8). Offering an ‘*arancino*’ to the people on the Diciotti, is framed as coming from a ‘gut feeling’ (8), and from an activism that is not only social and civic, but human (9).

The discourse that Laviano introduces in the public sphere seems to stand outside the stereotyping activated by the Victim Triangle. Salvini’s rhetoric is counteracted by

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Laviano's contrasting the closed port policy with one of 'open ports' (15), *Defending the borders* with 'welcome' (4) (6) (12) (14) (19) (20), and *Immigrants as a threat* with 'migrants as friends' (2) (16) and 'migrants as human beings' (3). However, Salvini is not framed as a Persecutor, and migrants are not constructed as victims.

Laviano finds in the common belonging to the human race the common ground requiring the acceptance of the other, the recognition of an akin ('*We are all human beings*' discourse). This sense of belonging exceeds any form of differences as it is seemingly rooted in the body: it can be felt in the gut (8) and is symbolised by food. This generic form of humanitarianism risks to neglect the power imbalances which lie behind differences.

#### Text 4.C – Analysis

In this video both two of the organisers of the demonstration "Catania accoglie" Laviano and Nellina Laganà, and a representative of an opposition party, Pippo Civati, are interviewed. Laviano repeats what already stated in his post. He refers to ideals of sharing (2), friendship (3), and to value of hospitality (2) The reference to the *polis* (4) contrasts the 'politics of parties' with a 'politics for all', exercised from bottom up. Laviano proposes the image of an active and responsible citizen.

Nellina Laganà presents migrants as guests - who are welcomed with food - (10), referring to the *Xènia*, the Greek tradition of hospitality. The sanctity of hospitality in the culture of ancient Greece is well known. The traveller was to be welcomed and fed, because a divinity could hide under his guise. Laganà also turns the *Defending our border* discourse around, framing the sea as the place where wealth comes from. As Cassano (2005) notes, while the sea can act as natural border that can separate, it

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can also act as a connector, making easier to reach another country. Cassano (2005) notes that though the Mediterranean Sea and the Aegean Sea separate lands, the distance they establish is cannot be compared to the immeasurable vastity of the Ocean. Talking about the Mediterranean sea, he says :“they are a strong discontinuity between the lands but not their *abandonment without orientation*” (p. 23, my italics). For Cassano, the distances posed by these seas highlight the possibility of relationship, and of contact, “even if this can be ferocious and terrible”. (p. 23). In this distance that connects with the Other, “there lies the jealous guard of one's autonomy and the ease of conflict, but also, close to them like the skin of the body, the repulsion towards any fundamentalism” (p. 23). If the sea-border is an interval simultaneously separating and connecting, Laganà places her emphasis on the second term of the relationship, shaping an image of the sea as a border that connects.

Pippo Civati', founder of the left-wing political party “Possible”, adopts a completely different tone. Civati - as well as other opposition politicians, leftist intellectuals and activists, frames Salvini as a kidnapper (14) and migrants as victims (15).

#### **Text 4.D – Analysis**

At this time, Maurizio Martina was the secretary of the Democratic Party. It is interesting to note that in his post he does not deal with the situation of the people on board the Diciotti, if not for a brief mention of their condition as hostages (3). Martina addresses Salvini directly, framing the members of the government as incapable (7) and chattering sovereigntists (3). The victim of this situation is Italy (4), an isolated nation (6), due to government initiatives.

#### **Text 4.E – Analysis**

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Saviano is interviewed during his visit to Riace, a Calabrian municipality famous for having been the site of an experiment of 'widespread reception', implemented by the then mayor Mimmo Lucano. The so called "Riace model" was based on the idea that migrants should not be perceived as a problem, but an opportunity to combat depopulation and preserve artisan activities. To achieve this goal, the funds allocated by the government for reception were transformed into "job grants", involving local cooperatives, to promote autonomy and integration. Here, Saviano, is 'playing on a friendly terrain'. Interviewed several times, he frames Salvini as an irresponsible clown (1), a criminal (2) (22), a subversive (4) (5)(23), a bully (12), a blackmailer (17) and an inhuman individual (20). He also establishes an implicit connection between Salvini and Mussolini when stating that his support will end, as it always happened to authoritarian leaders in Italian history (13). The hypothesis that Saviano evokes *Salvini as a fascist* discourse, a variant of *Salvini as a criminal*, is supported by the numerous public portrayals of the leader of the League in the guise of Mussolini at this time (see Annex, figure n. 2-3-4-5). It is interesting to note that Saviano attempts to distinguish the issue of the hospitality from the problem of control of migratory flows, two different, although inseparable, dimensions (Curi, 2010). *Hospitality*, in fact, must have an unconditional nature - namely it must not be reducible to political or ethical conditionings; the specific policies developed to handle the phenomenon of migration must deal with specific issues, historically determined and conditioned. However, when Curi (2010) states that these two positions must be distinguished, he also points out that that they are, at the same time, indissoluble. Thus, if policies and migration laws cannot be merely "inferred" by the unconditional principle of hospitality, they cannot contradict it either. Curi goes to the hearth of the matter when he identifies in fear, the core reason of the polarisation



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of the current public debate on migration around the principle of unconditional hospitality, and the one of ‘constrains of the current conditions’ which would support more restrictive policies, perceived as opposed to each other. In general, fear dominates the approach to the way in which migration is dealt with throughout Europe. This feeling, a symptom of an “invincible insecurity” (Curi, 2010, p. 17) must be addressed, for the relationship with others is fundamental for the construction of one’s identity, and also, for only by acknowledging the ambivalence felt toward otherness, it is possible to develop a real relationship of hospitality. With Curi (2010)’s words: “This fear must be taken care of - not simply by censoring its manifestations, nor, even less, by fuelling it with the sole aim of profiting from it in political terms. That fear indicates that, however confusedly one has grasped that...[...]this other forces me to question myself, calls me to a confrontation that I cannot escape. If appropriately “treated”, and not instrumentally used, that fear can become an essential element in building a hospitality relationship, as it makes the intrinsically ambivalent nature of that relationship clear from the beginning” (p. 17-18). To conclude, I suggest that, while Saviano is trying to distinguish the two dimensions of the *unconditional hospitality* and of the *constrains imposed by concrete historically determined issues*, he fails to explore this point effectively, and to focus on the factor of fear, underlying all Italian debate on the Diciotti case.

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## 5.1.6 Day 5 - 24 August 2018

### Text 5.A- Analysis

In this post Matteo Salvini comments on the hunger strike started by the individuals on board the Diciotti, on the morning of August 24<sup>th</sup>. The hunger strike is a form of non-violent political protest, aimed at gaining visibility for one's demands. Salvini neglects the political dimension of the strike, comparing between the migrants and the 5 million people who are 'forced to go on hunger strike' by poverty in Italy (4). Note that the statistical data cited by Salvini, though accurate, does not include only Italian citizens, as he suggests (6), as it includes legally resident foreign families and individuals, who represent the highest percentage of poor in all geographical areas (North, Centre, South)<sup>i</sup>. Migrants' hunger strikes provide Salvini with the opportunity for uttering the *Italians first discourse* (6), and to identify those who support migrants and oppose him as his and Italian people's enemies (5). The investigation of his action is framed as persecutory, carried out only to harm him, and with him all the Italians (7).

### Text 5.B-Analysis

In this text Salvini comments on the statements made by Saviano in Riace. As already mentioned, in this remote dialogue between the Minister of Interior and the writer, the situation of the shipwrecked becomes almost marginal. By framing the ban of the disembark of migrants as connected with his duty to guarantee Italians' safety, he is

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voicing the *Immigrant as a threat* discourse, and counteracting Saviano's framing of him as subversive, by positioning himself as rescuer. Saviano is positioned as someone not caring for Italians' security, and, therefore, as an enemy of Italians.

### Text 5.C – Analysis

At the time of this interview, Laura Boldrini was former president of the Chamber of Deputies, and deputy of the centre-left party -'Liberi e Uguali'. Prior to starting her political career, she had been U.N.H.C.R spokesperson for many years. Unsurprisingly, given her background, she was one of Salvini's fiercest political opponents. During the interview given to Fanpage.it – a newspaper closer to the left than to the government, she uses a language similar to the one adopted by Saviano, framing Salvini as a criminal (1)(11)(12)(15)(17)(18)(21)(29), a kidnapper (1)(11), an outlaw (12), and suggesting an affinity between Salvini and a dictator (2)(27).

Boldrini tries to counteract Salvini's *Breaking unfair laws* discourse, criticising Salvini's positioning of his actions towards the migrants disembark as political. By defining him a 'troublemaker' (17), the flouting of the rules is re-signified from a way to free Italians from the yoke approach imposed by the E.U. and by migrants, to an outlaw act of bully, without any political value. Salvini's political action is also delegitimised in terms of relations with the E.U., for his behaviours are leading to the isolation of Italy (30). The invitation to behave in an institutional manner and the use of pronoun 'we' (32) show that Boldrini is positioning herself as a reliable interlocutor capable of bringing Italy out of the isolation in which Salvini has confined it. However, she does not save Italy from isolation but also Italians, victims of Salvini's propaganda (28). Italians are portrayed as subjugated by Salvini's

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populism, lacking any real ability to choose, or agency. Boldrini's somewhat paternalistic vision will be exploited by Salvini to position her as part of those leftist elites remote from the needs of ordinary people.

Boldrini counteracts Salvini's *I am father* discourse too (25), by constructing him as lacking any of a father's qualities, and showing his inadequacy by portraying the migrant girls held prisoners on board and denied health care as his imaginary daughters (25). She voices the legal discourse Respecting the Constitution and International law, (14), not surprisingly given her previous role at U.N.H.C.R. However, she cannot avoid victimising refugees, (13) (22)(23)(24), presenting them as abused and vulnerable. Following the constructions of *Migrants as victims*, she counteracts the Migrants as bogus refugees discourse (37), stressing migrants' provenience from a country ruled by a dictatorship.

### **5.1.7 – Day 6 - August 25, 2018**

#### **Text 6A – Analysis**

As mentioned, the strategy adopted by Salvini to counteract Boldrini's positions is to avoid responding to her criticisms on the merits, instead positioning her as part of a left-wing elite, remote from the hardship - especially economic - of ordinary people. He manipulates the video of an interview, showing Boldrini is in front of the Diciotti Ship, and asserts that she has been requested not to get on board by the port authority for security reasons, as the shipwrecked people are refusing food, having started a hunger strike. The statement "the shipwrecked people refused food" is re-aired several times, in slow motion, and distorting Boldrini's voice. Salvini frames what is,

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actually, a form of protest for being kept on the ship, as the migrants' offensive and ungrateful attitude. This allows him to juxtapose migrants and poor Italians, and to, implicitly, voice the *Italians first* discourse. Boldrini is constructed as being remote from the needs of the most disadvantaged Italians (2), and then as a persecutor.

### Text 6.B – Analysis

This speech relies on the *Us and Them* discourse, which organises all the rest of the text. Salvini employs a range of strategies and resources to position both, himself and Italians as victims, establishing a relation of identification between his political and judicial destiny, and that of all Italians. By associating his being investigated for kidnapping with the rhetoric of they will not “to stop us” (1), he implies that the investigation is just a form of political persecution, in response to his his willingness to stop migration and oppose the E.U. By using the pronoun we, he includes all Italians in the category of those unjustly persecuted (1) (4), establishing an equivalence between his political actions and “60 million people’s desire for change”, and summoning a sort of identification between him and all Italians (1). This is later reinforced by his juxtaposition of “my reasons” and “your reasons” (11), and by his reference to the investigation against him as being determined by his willingness to defend Italians ‘rights (12) and the borders (3)(4) (12), voicing the *Defending our borders* and *We have already given enough* discourses.

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Salvini, presents migration as an unwelcome phenomenon (he frequently adds the pejorative adjective *illegal* to immigration during the speech), and the prevention of *illegal immigration* as a step toward a positive change, that all the Italians aim to achieve (1). The “*Italians first*” discourse recurs several times during his speech, resuming and reinforcing the juxtaposition of *Us and Them* (10)(16). During his speech, Salvini gradually adds more subjects to the category of the “Them”, establishing several connections among different networks of meanings, linking all his political enemies. In order to reach this goal .Salvini positions as resonant categories with “those who wants to stop us” (1): the judiciary, persecuting him rather than those responsible for the deaths in Genoa; the European Union (E.U.), demanding Italians’ money but only willing “look the other way” when needed ( 7); the MPs of the Democratic Party (PD), *left-wing geniuses* absent from the funeral in Genoa, but present on the ship of *immigrants* (10); the smugglers buying weapons and drugs, *with the thousands of dollars that they bring home from immigrants*, and selling them to Italian children (11); the Italian tax department, killing artisans and pensioners failing to pay taxes, instead of checking *foreigners’ shops* and businesses (22); 700 thousands bogus refugees who *did not run away from any war, rather, they brought the war in our house* (35). The judiciary investigating him is also responsible for failing to identify those responsible for the deaths in Genoa, to protect the Italian borders of Italy, while wasting time in trying to stop his efforts to arrest *illegal immigration*, on behalf of all Italians. He opposes two kind of judiciary – the one swiftly persecuting him is the same ineffective organism keeping Italians (the divorced and the entrepreneurs) waiting years for justice (3)(4)(12), politicised and and on friendly terms with the Democratic Party – the other judiciary is the one fighting against Mafia, Camorra, and Andrangheta. Salvini evokes the figure of judge

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Livatino judge (12), killed in the fight against the mafia, as symbol of ‘the good judiciary, not colluding with political power, organised crime, an illegal immigration. In the “Them” polarity of the *Us and Them* discourse are included: illegal migrants; the ineffective and politicised judiciary; the organised criminality; the smugglers; those who sells drug in front of the schools of ‘our’ children. In the polarity of the *Us* are included: Salvini; all Italians; the judges-heroes, the innocent Italian children.

According to Salvini, who sides with the welcoming of migrants, sides with illegal immigration, and with a politicised and ineffective judiciary, but also with the wealthy and powerful, at the expense of the poorest Italians. This last association is constructed by linking illegal immigration, the European Union (E.U.), and the left-wing party members. The role played by a “too sympathetic” attitude toward *immigrants*, in the conjuring up of many/several Italians' persecutors is particular clear in the discursive strategies construing left-party members as enemies of the Italian people. After voicing the *We have already given enough* discourse, suggesting that Italians have done more than their duty in order to help immigrants (9), he declares his willingness to send back the next ship of migrants and to be investigated *also* for this (9). Through the conjunction “also”, he reminds the audience that, by investigating him, persecutory judiciary is trying to stop Italian’s wish for change (1). There is another enemy responsible to hinder this Italians’ wish, indicated by Salvini as the MPs of P.D., referred to with the antiphrasis *left-wing genius* (10). He suggests that left-party members and the persecutory judiciary are colluding, a point he will return to later (13). Crucially, by addressing directly the P.D. members to remind them their absence at the funeral in Genoa, and their presence on the ship of the *immigrants*, and that there are Italians unable “to put together the lunch with the dinner” (10), he portrays them as disinterested in the problems of Italian people, and

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only caring for immigrants, in collusion with the E.U., to render Italy the repository of unwanted immigrants. He continues, describing P.D. members as rich and wealthy big mouths with the rolex watches on their wrists, completely unsympathetic toward those in condition of poverty (12). Salvini closely links the élite of the P.D. and the members of E.U, pointing out their shared attitude toward Italians and their needs. This populist anti-European discourse is based on the rhetoric that the E.U. is composed of bureaucrats remote from the needs of the people, incapable of taking concrete actions, and only interested in favouring the big financial elites and banks. Salvini takes up these traditional themes, stressing that the E.U. is purely interested in Italians' money and, when when needed , is quick to “look the other way”(7). E.U. representatives are *the usual big mouths* (8) - exactly like the P.D. members - only able to answer *no, no, no* (15) to the requests of Italians. Here we can detect the *E.U as stepmother discourse*, opposed to Italy as an idealised mother country.

Salvini continues, mentioning the Sophia military mission (21), to introduce the persecutory idea of a collusion between the previous government and the E.U. to bring all the ‘illegal immigrant’ into Italy. He, then, cites three criminal cases, stressing that the authors were *immigrants* (22),(23)(24). This reference to exemplificative cases serves to extend the behaviours of few people to the entire category to which they belong, strengthening the *Immigrants as a threat discourse*.

The Italian and European *big mouths*, included in the ‘Them’ category, are the opposites of Salvini and his allies, framed as concrete politicians, and *The doers* (11) (12) (31) who put *Italians first* (21).

To conclude, any sympathetic attitude toward migrants is portrayed as a betrayal of the Italian people, and connected to the E.U, left-wing party, and the corrupted and ineffective judiciary exploitations of the countrys. The anti-immigration discourse is



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strictly connected with anti-European, anti neo-liberalism discourses. The figure of the ‘Immigrant’ evokes other persecutory figures, attracting and welding together discourses belonging to different domains of reality, and oversimplifying political and economic issues that would require complex analysis to be effectively addressed. By referring to the *problem of immigrants*, several issues affecting Italy – the economic crises, the relationship with the European Union, the crises of the P.D., the collapse of the pension system, and the inefficiency of the reception system – are simplified by pointing out clear culprits to blame. Feelings of entitlement and self-righteousness are evoked, for the reader/listener to be positioned in a victim position. While Salvini portrays to share the sufferings of Italians, he refutes their passivity, as in his role of “the doer”, is the one who can overturn the situation and save the Italian people from these many dangers. In so doing, he positions himself as the saviour.

### **Text 6.C - Analysis**

This text is a press release from Doctor for Human Rights (MEDU). MEDU is an independent, non-profit humanitarian organisation established with the aim of bringing healthcare aid to the most vulnerable populations, and denouncing violations of human rights and, in particular, exclusion from access to care. Given their mission, linking healthcare and human rights, their participation to the dialogical network is not surprising. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that their claim that, the kind of medical support people on board require is psychological. A number of assumptions underlines their press release: castaways are victim of torture (2); they have suffered multiple psychological traumas (4); events as earthquakes or serious road accidents are traumatic in themselves (5); all those who pass through these “traumatic events” need immediate psychological assistance, to

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avoid developing traumatic stress (5); being blocked on the Diciotti ship is like to be detained (10); the permanence on the Diciotti ship is likely to activate a secondary re-traumatisation (9). By assuming the following: events are traumatic in themselves – regardless of people’s range of reactions to them; all refugees have been through torture and violence; all of them are traumatised and in need of specific psychological care, MEDU is constructing the *Refugee as a victim* discourse (Papadopoulos, 2021). It is worth reminding that the castaways had been, in fact, receiving medical assistance, but MEDU claims that they were denied ‘this type of specialist assistance’ (6) – the psychological support, that according to this organisation, would prevent the development of stress disorders. However, as Papadopoulos pointed out, imposing formal psychotherapy and positioning survivors as patients can prevent people from developing their own resilience, thus hindering the healing process (Papadopoulos, 2001) He suggests that “therapeutic witnessing” (Papadopoulos, 1999), namely an approach featured by active listening in the context of a therapeutic relationship, is the most effective way to support refugees.

### Text 6.D

Stefano Principato was the president of the Catania committee of the Italian Red Cross, a government organisation at that time. This interview was conducted by Radio Radicale, the official radio station of the Italian Radical Party whose ideology rests on values of civil, social, religious libertarianism combined with economic liberalism. At the time, the Radical Party was in the opposition. The journalist’s stance is clearly against the ban imposed by Salvini, describing the individuals on the ship as

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imprisoned (2). Due to his institutional role, Principato carefully avoids to openly agreeing with the interviewer's position. However, his attempt to counteract some of the negative stereotypes on migrants – circulating in the networks - lets emerge his sympathy for them. His stressing that some of the castaways *might*, or *might not* have BCE lung problems, should be viewed in this perspective, as a way to counteract the *Immigrants as a threat* discourse. The emphasis of his description of the castaways as 'people' rather than migrants, voices the rhetoric underlying the *They are human beings* discourse, counteracting the negative stereotyping of migrants. Principato's attempt, however, has an ambiguous outcome as in trying to counteract *Immigrant as a threat* discourse he ends up victimising refugees. This is apparent when he takes for granted that psychological support is crucial when migrant women undergo a gynaecological examination (17).

### **5.1.8 – Day 7 - August 26, 2018**

#### **Text 7.A Analysis**

In this short post, Salvini addresses his readers, with the aim of delegitimising the investigation against him (1)(2) and of positioning himself as unjustly persecuted (3) by the judiciary, and as the one defending the safety of the Italian people (5). Here he is voicing the *Migrants as a threat* discourse, in its variant *All migrants are terrorists.*

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The *Defending our border* discourse is also implied, for his decision to close ports was supported by anti-terrorist rhetoric. Clearly, being the migrants a threat, the failure of the judiciary to protect Italians from the danger of terrorists, renders this institution an additional threat to their safety. Salvini places himself in the saviour position, resulting in a DE legitimisation of the judiciary institution.

### 5.1.8 – Day 8 - August 27, 2018

#### Text 8.A- Analysis

This speech contains many of Salvini's arguments: the *E.U as a stepmother* (3)(12), the collusion of the judiciary with the so-called strong powers (8) (9), the victimisation of Italians by several persecutors (the E.U; the financial markets (12) the migrants. Although Paragone frames migrants as a problem (3) (12), he relies less than Salvini on the *Immigrant as a threat* discourse, to focus almost entirely on *the E.U as stepmother* discourse. This approach might be explained by Paragone's political affiliation to the "Movimento 5 Stelle", that has made the anti-neoliberal rhetoric one of its strong points. According to him, migrants are exploited by capitalism in the labour supply – an image more fitting with the anti-neoliberalism stance. Paragone frames Salvini's ban as political (1), though in order to support this view, he needs to temper Salvini's attack on the judiciary, rejecting the idea that the investigation against him is part of a political design.

By voicing the *E.U as step mother* discourse, Paragone places the E.U. in the position of the persecutor, and the migrants and the Italians in that of the victims. While migration is framed as a problem, the E.U. lack of support is presented as proof of a

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retaliation against the Italians' choice of a government, disliked by the union (12) for its focus on the welfare of its citizens, rather than on the interests of finance and strong powers (13). In framing E.U. as persecutory entity, Paragone justifies Salvini's ban as, from this viewpoint, *Breaking unfair rules* (5) is legitimate and unavoidable to restore if Italian sovereignty. Thus, the *Salvini as subverter* discourse is re-contextualised in positive terms, and overturned in that of the Saviour. In this speech next to Europe, another persecutory entity is evoked, that of a judiciary colluding with the strong powers, and guilty of failing to investigating those exploiting migrants (7).

### **5.1.9 - March 2020**

#### **Text 9. A - Analysis**

This text is a Facebook post written by a doctor - I will call him Carlo - who visited the migrants on the Diciotti ship. Carlo wrote this post almost two years after his meeting and visiting of the individuals on the Diciotti ship. The encounter with migrants, as staged in the text, is, therefore, a memory recalled during the COVID pandemic. Despite his clear grasp of the migrants 'suffering, he does not victimise them. Arguably, the uncertainty and disorientation experienced during the pandemic,

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together with the temporal distance from the occurrence of the events, allowed him to frame the Diciotti case in completely different terms from those previously suggested by in the actors of the dialogic network. In this text, despite his profession, Carlo does not act as a saviour, avoiding to re-create the power imbalance typical of the saviour-victim relationship. In the first part of his text (2) (8), he presents himself as an empathetic witness of the migrants' predicament. In the second part (9) (13) he is able to convey the same disorientation he thinks they experienced.

Carlo never places himself in a position of superiority over the migrants, and precisely, for this, he is able to identify the source of their pain not in the tortures suffered in Libya, or the deprivations experienced during their journey, or staying on the Diciotti, rather, in their sense of disorientation caused by feeling in an unfamiliar place (8), in a land felt as hostile (13), namely by the disturbance caused to migrants' *onto-ecological-settledness*, due to involuntary dislocation. *Onto-ecological-settledness* is a concept used by Papadopoulos (2021) to refer to the whole pattern producing the identity of a person and including an *intentionally perceptible* part, and a *mosaic part*. The former includes all those elements that an individual consciously recognises as belonging to themselves (gender, age, physical and psychological characteristic, profession, employment status political and ideological beliefs, religious affiliation, culture, nationality, ethnicity, wider belief systems, hobbies, perception of body characteristics); the latter encompasses the imperceptible parts of our identity as visual and auditory perceptions related to our environment; exposure to certain rhythms of life, habits, rituals, routines; the particular sense of time and space we experience in our environment; the sense of belonging to a variety of entities as family, community, group of friends, neighbourhood. Thus, the migrants; feeling of alarm and danger (6) is clearly linked to finding themselves in an unknown and

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unfamiliar environment (7)(8). Papadopoulos refers to the concept of *nostalgic disorientation* to categorise the effects of the *onto-ecological unsettledness*, that condition which follows the ruptures of the *onto-ecological settledness*. Rather than victimising migrants, then, Carlo identifies in the nostalgic disorientation the condition suffered by those who find themselves in far from the familiarity of their home, as he himself felt during COVID 19.

## 5.2 The “Diciotti case”: a network of archetypal images

The unit of analysis of this research is the dialogical networks activated by Salvini’s ban on the migrants’ disembark. Each text is analysed as part of a wider communicative exchange, in a dialogical and interactional network. Texts are interconnected by sequential structures, as those structuring everyday conversations, as well as by thematic commonalities. I have identified the following recurrent discourses:

1. *“Italians first”*;
2. *“We have already given enough”*;
3. *“E.U as stepmother”*;
4. *“Immigrants as a threat”*; (and its variants: *“Immigrants as criminals”*, *“All migrants are terrorists”*, *Immigrants as an economic burden*, *“Immigrants as bogus asylum seekers”*, *“Immigrants as parasites”*, *“Immigrants as bad parents”*)
5. *“I am a father”*;
6. *“Breaking unfair laws”*;
7. *“Defending our borders”*;

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8. *"We are the doers"*;
  9. *"Respecting the Constitution and International law"*;
  10. *"Salvini as a criminal"*; (and its variants: *"Salvini as a fascist"*, *"Salvini as a subverter"*).
  11. *"They are human beings"*
  12. *"Us and Them"*;
  13. *"We are all human beings"*
  14. *"Refugees as victims"*

The core themes informing these discourses are those of the victim/s (*Italians first; We have already given enough; Refugees as victims; they are human beings*); the external enemy - conceptualised as persecutor - (*E.U as stepmother; Immigrants as a threat; Salvini as a criminal*); the need for safety and protection, namely, for a saviour function (*we are the doers; respecting the constitution and the international law*).

These discourses create the subject positions of the victim, the perpetrator and the rescuer that, far from being fixed and immutable, are continuously generated and exchanged among the actors, as they interact with each other in the network. I also noticed the appearance of alternative discourses, one revolving around the theme of a common shared humanity - uttered in front of the port of Catania during an apparently spontaneous demonstration; the other focussing on the topic of disorientation and loss of identity affecting people when they find themselves in unfamiliar situations, voiced two years later, in the form of a memory, by a doctor who assisted the migrants on the Diciotti ship. However, these alternative discourses are only episodic and do not represent the majority of discursive exchanges. In this



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section, I will try to demonstrate that the activation of a *dialogical network* corresponds to that of a *network of archetypal images*, which can be interpreted through the model of the *Victim Diamond*, proposed by Papadopoulos (2021). This model presents several advantages, providing a framework where the following issues left unresolved by Foucault can be addressed.

First, while the traditional Foucauldian framework can explain how otherness is produced, it fails to account for the double nature of the stereotypes on IDPs. The *refugees as a threat / refugee as a victim* - stereotypes are recurring themes - detectable at times and in places distant from each other - at the same time the outsiders are stigmatised in ways which are contingent to contemporary social and political activities, namely, contingent to the setting (Leudar, 2008). Refugees can be shaped as natural disasters, illnesses, criminals, economic burden; they can be assigned a range of different characteristics in contrast to the values considered important in a specific context as: greediness, lust, passivity, stupidity, bestiality, laziness, aggressiveness. Therefore, a theoretical approach accounting – at once - for the stability of the victim-perpetrator theme. and for the variability of representations which embody these themes, is needed.

Second, Foucault's theory fails to provide us with an effective way to understand the reasons why "particular discourses are taken up by some subjects and not by others" (Barker & Galansinski, 2001, p. 31, in Miller, 2011, p. 191). Also, he leaves the question of agency and choice unresolved, due to his lack of clarity when explaining how a subject - created through (a) disciplinary discursive power/s – can resist power and choose to act (Miller, 2011).

Third, by relying solely on a Foucauldian approach, we would not be able to explain why, within the same society, some social groups are more likely to be gripped by

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the representation of the *Refugees as threat*, while others will be definitely be convinced by the *Refugee as a victim* discourse. Also, we would not be able to account for the appearance in the public sphere of alternative discourses – as those of Laviano and Nellina Laganà (texts 4.B and 4.C) and Carlo. (9.A) – capable to resist mainstream discourses and avoid occupying the subjective positions - assumed to be discursively created in Foucauldian framework - of the victim, the persecutor, and the rescuer.

Whether the discourses within the dialogical network are analysed in light of the Victim Diamond, these three points can be addressed. The Victim Diamond can be conceptualised as an *interactional matrix*, where the stereotypical interactions among participants should be accepted as being of *archetypal* nature (Papadopoulos, 2021, p.192). Jungian theory of archetypes and Papadopoulos' (2011) concept of *network of archetypal images* can account for the ubiquity of certain motifs, appearing through human history, and for their context-specific character at once.

As discussed in chapter 2, the *archetypes as such* are organising structures, shaping experiences, behaviours, events, motifs, and symbols. As they are contents of the collective unconscious – a layer of the psyche shared by all human beings - they are universal, innate and inherited. Jung considered them as empty forms, in their unconscious state, though filled by contents provided by the socio-cultural context, that modify the original content, when they manifest in personal or collective consciousness,. Jug called *archetypal images*, these concrete images, altered both by the 'colour' of the individual consciousness in which it happens to manifest, but also by historical and social influences (Jung, 1959/1968; Waddell, 2006). The hypothesis of the existence of innate dispositions towards certain organisational experiences helps clarifying the scapegoating dynamic (Girard, 1987), and the tendency of people

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to act as saviours when dealing with victims, while the concept of *archetypal images* accounts for the multiple images embodied by these dynamics, in different socio-historical contexts.

Within Jungian theoretical framework, the issue of the social actors' agency can be addressed too, - particularly when referring to Papadopoulos' (2011) concept of *network of archetypal images*. As discussed in more detail in chapter 3, Papadopoulos (2011) suggests that archetypes do not affect individual in isolation but in networks of archetypal images, forming collective structures of meanings. He also refers to the concept of the *Umwelt*, blending "both 'internal' and 'external' dimensions in a unique way" (Papadopoulos, 2011, p.213), as that part of the environment that is of relevance to an individual. In human beings the *Umwelt* is the part of the environment significant for us, based on our biological endowment, but it also own a social character, including the entire semiotic system that allows human beings to communicate. Papadopoulos argues that the archetypal realms can be best understood as located within the bio-semiotic sphere that the *Umwelt* delineates, rather than in either the neurobiological or social realms. The networks of archetypal images can expand individuals' *Umwelt*, including an/the (?)unknown part of it, that had never been part of their experience before.

According to Jung, therefore, the subject needs to deal with a-priori structures - the network of archetypal images. As impersonal a-priori- prototype structures, they render experience possible, as "nothing can be experienced or even registered from 'outside', unless there is some precondition 'inside' to make it knowable" (Papadopoulos, 2011, p. 218). In addition to this, Foucault's subject needs to deal with the a-priori structure of the discursive formations shaping their identity. For accuracy, the subject in Foucault is entirely absorbed by the discourses that pass

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through them, so much so that no subjectivity is present outside of discourses. Foucault's, is a subject devoid of a conscience in psychological terms, whose very thoughts are, so to speak, thought by the discourses that constitute them, because discourses restrict even what is thinkable. There is no distance between themselves and the discourse, that can never be perceived as an otherness. Conversely, Jung's archetypes, while creating the a-priori condition needed to experience external phenomena, relate them to the individual's intrapsychic dimension. Meaning is generated through the interaction of archetypal images, external world, and individual psyche, iteration that leads to the expansion of the *Umwelt*. Therefore, it can be said that, while individuals do not disappear in Jung's theory, what does disappear is any crude dualism between individual and society, internal and external. The Jungian theory of archetypes addresses the intra-/inter-/trans-psyche for the archetype being "neither 'inside' nor 'outside'" (p. 218 di cosa?).

Thus, though individuals find the pre-conditions which render discourses intelligible in the network of archetypal images, they are not mechanically destined to be completely gripped by them. Certainly, these contents are emotionally charged – a topic that will be discussed shortly. Nevertheless, for Jung individuals' task consist in confronting the unconscious, giving a shape to emotions, and establishing a dialogue with the figures emerging from it. Thus, according to Jung, individuals have the possibility of interacting with the archetypal realm, when it constellates and originates archetypal images.

Certainly, this is not a simple task, due to archetypes' emotional charge. Archetypes, do not just represent typical experiences, but also push the subject to action. With Jung's words: "Not only are the archetypes, apparently, impressions of ever-repeated typical experiences, but at the same time, they behave empirically like agent that tend

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toward the repletion of these same experiences. For when an archetype appears in a dream, in a fantasy, or in life, it always brings with it a certain influence or power by virtue of which it either exercises a numinous or a fascinating effect or impels to action” (Jung 1917; 1926; 1943, essays, CW7, pars 106-109, in Storr, 1986, p. 71). When archetypal images come into contact with the conscious mind, they have an extraordinary impact on the individual, due to their being originated by a deep layer of the psyche. Archetypal images grip and hold in a grip people, arousing, often, a feeling of mystery and awe (Samuel, 1985).

Papadopoulos (1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2002c, 2005a, 2005b, 2006) introduced the expressions ‘archetypal dazzle’, ‘archetypal radiation’ and ‘archetypal whirlpool’ to define the effect of archetypal unipolar, and saturated by collective material ,manifestations on people. While for Jung archetypes are bipolar, in occurrence of acute political polarisation, one polar of the archetype suppresses the other, and “any elements that belong to the other pole” (Papadopoulos, 2009 p.194). Pure unipolar archetypal images, uncontaminated by any personal dimension exert an irresistible fascination, and numinous power, so that “individuals and groups tend to become totally gripped by their power” and sucked “into set clusters of epistemologies, positioning and actions, dictated exclusively by the one pole of an archetype” (p. 194). The *archetypal whirlpool* does not cancel people’s agency, rather it restrains it, rendering some *subjective positions* more likely to be occupied than others, and explaining the scarce presence in the public sphere of those I called alternative discourses.

I do not suggest replacing the concept of discourse with that of archetypal network. The idea of discourse, as a set of practices producing subject positions and identities, has still epistemological value, providing a mapping of how power relations organise

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the othering processes, within social dynamic. I believe, however, that, by postulating that discourses reveal/activate a network of archetypal images, we might develop a model integrating the existence of suprapersonal epistemological configurations - Foucault would call them '*epistemes*' (Parker, 1993), and the chance for individuals to exercise some agency, albeit under some restraints. From a methodological perspective, the notion of network of archetypal images might offer an indication of how to analyse symbols, and uncovering not explicit meanings. According to Samuels (1985), the archetype interlaces themes, pattern and behaviours, in the form of kind of cognitive schemata, with images and the imaginal, namely, with the *symbolic domain*, and mingle these with emotion, instinct and the body. As mentioned in chapter 4, the symbol in Jungian theoretical framework "escapes the dictatorship of the sign" (Galimberti, 2009, p. 91), namely, it does not refer to anything known, as the sign does, but to a content that for the most part transcends consciousness; it is the best expression of something that cannot be better characterised in a given moment, and to grasp which the analyst must amplify the images through association with material taken from myths, fairy tales, stories, or historical parallel.

In concluding, I shall briefly mention that Jung's interest in culture has been developed further by Henderson (1990) through his concept of the *cultural unconscious*, assuming the existence of a distinct realm that lies between the personal and the collective unconscious, or, as he states: between "the collective unconscious and the manifest pattern of culture" that, in spite possibly including both, conscious and unconscious modalities, "has some kind of identities arising from the archetypes of the collective unconscious [...]" (p. 113) that are responsible for the formation of myths and for the individuals' development. Building on Jung's theory of complexes

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and on Henderson's cultural unconscious, Singer & Kimbles (2004) elaborated the idea of *cultural complexes* as an "essential component of a inner sociology" (p. 4). As discussed in chapter 3, cultural complexes are aggregates of emotionally charged ideas and images clustered around and archetypal cores, and are based on repeated historical experiences shared by the members of a group. Both the ideas of cultural complex, and of the Victim Diamond can be fruitfully applied to approach individual and group differences, in terms of their positioning and conceptualisation of social phenomena.

### **5.2.1 'Us& Them'– discourse and the network of archetypal images**

I shall begin with noting that Salvini and his allies started the dialogical network as demonstrated by the scarcity of texts referring to the Diciotti case prior to August 20<sup>th</sup>, when the ship arrived at the port of Catania, and Salvini announced the ban on the disembark of the migrants. Salvini's communication has been defined populist (Di Cicco & Sensales, 2019). Populism is characterised by the centrality of two ideas, that of the 'people' and that of the 'others'. According to Riemann et al. (2017):

The core features that distinguish populism from other ideologies are: (1) the centrality of the idea (or of the ideas) of the 'people' (p. 18), around which populists try 'to create a new social identity among citizens [...] in order to unite them and generate a sense of belonging to an imagined community' (p. 19); and (2) the construction of 'the others' as counterparts taking the form of

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elites and/or out-groups against which the people affirm their pre-eminence  
(pp. 19-21, in Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018, p. 3).

Taking into consideration the above, and moving from the assumptions that Salvini gained his consensus through a political campaign centred on anti-immigration themes, and his main interest, at the time, was to maintain his political power -- it is reasonable to conclude that his 'counterpart other' were the migrants. Papadopoulos' (2021) epistemological cycle can be fruitfully applied here, to clarify the way in which Salvini constructed his approach to migration. The *epistemological cycle* expresses the idea that our understanding of phenomena and our behaviours are formed through an epistemological process consisting of three phases influencing each other, respectively called: *initial epistemological perspective*; *positioning*; *action*. In the first one we form all the assumptions and presuppositions at the origin of our primary conceptualisation of a phenomenon. The first epistemological perspective determines our *positioning*, identifying the way in which we position ourselves and the others, in relation to the situation we are addressing. Our positioning affects the third phase, that of *action*, by rendering certain courses of actions possible, and other not. Furthermore, with the expression of "epistemological acting out" (Papadopoulos, 2021, p.16).

I believe that Salvini's construction of migration was determined by the third stage, namely, by what he expected to obtain from the phenomena of migration. As he hoped to gain electoral consensus, he needed a suitable 'other' to oppose to 'the people'. The perfect targets were the 'Immigrants' that had to be shaped 'as a threat'. In view of this, we understand how the statements made by those in favour of blocking the Diciotti Ship, and primarily, by Salvini were organised according to the 'Us and



Them' discourse. The 'Us and Them' discourse opposes two categories: in-groups and out-groups (Milesi, 2011). In-groups include friends – the Us - while the out-groups include the enemies – the Them. The *Us versus Them* discourse has the function of strengthening the in-group identity of the Us, and to create the otherness of the out-group, Them. I would like to start considering Salvini's discourses. In the texts analysed, the in-groups Us comprise Salvini, his political allies, Giorgia Meloni and Luigi Di Maio, and all Italians, while the out-groups Them encompass the immigrants, the E.U, the elites, the PD, Leftist cooperative, the NGOs, the France, Saviano, the smugglers, the prosecutor office, Malta, Laura Boldrini (see Tab 1).

Tab 1

<b>US and Them</b>	
Us	Them
Salvini and his political allies	Illegal immigrants
All the Italians	European Union
	The elites
	The Democratic Party
	Leftist cooperative
	The NGOs
	France
	Saviano
	The smugglers

	The prosecutor office
	Malta
	Laura Boldrini

The ‘Us and Them’ discursive framework organises on a number of bite-sized discourses expressed in stock ways that, following Strauss (2012), I called conventional or standardised discourses. As discussed in chapter 4, while a discourse in Foucault’s terms, constrains the realm of debatable conventional discourses (Strauss, 2012 p. 19), these, in turn facilitate the structuring of a wider Foucauldian discursive framework. Standardised discourses are underpinned by cultural models, namely, cognitive schemas that simplify issues focusing only on certain facet of situations. According to Strauss (2012), - albeit within the boundaries set by broader systems of knowledge and practice - social actors express a certain degree of agency as they select, combine and interpret these mental models in creative ways, when constructing and interpreting the social world. Strauss (2012) also stresses that conventional discourses can be triggered by an external stimulus like the content or the wording of a comment in an everyday setting, something that is heard, or read. Specific discourses can be triggered by reference to their assumptions, and to their characteristic keywords or rhetorical style. These prompts can recall to social actors’ minds the entire cognitive schema, underpinning a discourse.

I believe that these often-repeated schemas, often expressed through a catchphrase, can reveal the presence of a personal and/or cultural complex. When discussing the word association test, Jung highlighted that the habitual use of the same words can flag a disturbance, namely, reveal the existence of a complex (Jung, Tavistock

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Lecture II, CW18, pars- 97-106). Following the above, I argue that the frequency with which conventional discourses are uttered within the *dialogical network* can have two meanings. It can signal the attempt to cause the activation of a complex, and it can be interpreted as a symptom that the latter has been activated and the speaker has been ‘taken’ by a complex. As complexes, either personal or cultural, are emotionally charged, in the following analysis, I will try to identify the emotion/s that reasonably underpin/s standardised discourses. I shall focus first, on the ‘Us’ polarity of the ‘Us and Them’ discourse, and on the discourses: *Italians first* and *We have already given enough*, often recurring together.

The rhetoric underling the *Italians first* discourse is that due to the corruption of past governments, more loyal to the ‘strong powers’ than to the citizens, Italians have been servants of E.U which imposed to them to be servants of immigrants too. Italians are urged by the utterer to get out of this condition of subjection and regain their proud. This feeling of having suffered humiliation is confirmed and strengthened by the rhetoric of “*we have already given enough*”, according to which Italians have done for migrants more than they were supposed. This belief solicits a sense of entitlement which can develop in a feeling of self-righteousness



Graph 1 – The Us polarity of the Us and Them discourse – Italians as victims

Referring to Papadopoulos' (2020) distinction between being a *victimised person* and developing a *victim identity* - addressed in chapter 2-, I suggest that Salvini's discourses, and those of his supporters, foster the development of a victim identity in the readers/listeners by conjuring up the victim archetype, out of any real context of genuine victimisation. While populists aim to evoke feelings of pride and a sense of entitlement in an undifferentiated "folk" (Di Cicco & Sensales, 2019), inappropriate demands for entitlement, self-directed emotion of pride, together with other-directed

feelings of blame, anger and resentment, are core elements of the Victim Identity (Papadopoulos, 2020). The other cornerstone of populist communication is the construction of the external enemy/ies, as targets of the blame. The *defending our borders* conventional discourse seems to fulfil this function, evoking a feeling of impending threat, justifying the othering of ‘external enemies’.



Graph 2 – The Victim identity in the Diciotti case

In the Italian language, border can be translated with the words *confine* (border) and *frontiera* (frontier). *Confine* indicates “in a geographical sense a transition zone in which the identifying characteristics of a region disappear and the differentiating ones begin” (Treccani). *Frontiera* is the border line “which is close to the border” (Treccani) or, in a figurative sense, “a line that clearly separates different environments or situations or concepts” (Treccani). The two terms are today used as synonymous, their meanings also referring to separation and identity because they

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involve the grasping of similarities and of differences, and the separating of what is identical from what differs. However, *confine* and *frontiera* have other less explicit meanings relating to the pair's hostility/knowledge factors, and to the idea of connecting, putting together. *Frontiera* derives from the Latin *frons, frontis*, "fronte" (forehead). Frontiers place men opposite each other. As noted by Cassano (2005), the sense of this 'standing in front of each other' can differ as it might mean to monitor the Other, or not to turn the back to them. This interpretation identifies the frontier as the place of separation, opposition and suspicion, because "you give the shoulders only to those you trust and who do not need to be followed with your eyes" (Cassano, 2005, p. 52). On the other hand, though 'standing in front' is the only condition allowing one to look at the other in the eyes, to know their face. The frontier, therefore, is also the place where the Other can be met, known, recognised. *Frontis*, after all, in the classical world indicated the limit between the known and the unknown and was conceived as as flexible rather than static. The unknown can be explored, in the frontier dwells a tension towards the expansion of knowledge, towards adventure and discovery which survives in expressions as 'le frontiere della conoscenza' - the boundaries of knowledge.

Also *Confine* contains a double meaning; it derives from the Latin *cum* (with) *finis* (limit, end). *Finis* means limit or end. Limiting and being limited are essential conditions for the formation of the identity, it is by recognising "our ending where the other begins" (Cassano, 2005, p.52), that we acquire our shape. This is true for groups too. The foundation/sof a city separate/s it from all the others, bringing together its residents in one single community. The border identifies a community through contrast to all the others, in other words, it unites *because* separates (Cassano, 2005). However, the suffix *cum* reveals an additional meaning as a border line is

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shared between those on each of the opposite sides of it. *Confinis* in Latin as noun means ‘the neighbour’ while as adjective ‘what is contiguous’, ‘what is neighbouring’, but also ‘what is affine, similar, collimating, closely connected’ (Dizionario Latino).

The border, therefore, deals with identity and with the issue - closely connected - of the relationship with the Otherness. The duplicity contained in the word border, recalls the two *inseparable* attitudes toward the Other that Curi (2010) identified in the numinous dimension of the *tremendum et fascinans* - discussed in chapter 2. The debate on the nature of otherness and its relation to the Self has been addressed by many authors from different perspectives<sup>i</sup>. Ricoeur (1994), focusing on the relationship between the ‘Other’ and the development of individual identity, wrote that ‘the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other’ (p. 3). Also, the Polish philosopher Tischner (1998) highlighted the reliance of the emergence of the identity on the presence of the Other:

At the beginning of the birth of the *ego* is the presence of the *you*, and perhaps also the presence of a more general *we*. Only in dialogue, in conflict, in opposition, as well as in the tension towards a new communion, the awareness of *my ego* is created as an *autonomous being*, independent of the other. I know that I am because I know that there is the *other*. (Tischner, 1998, in Kapuściński, 2016, p.55)

However, the relationship with the otherness is essential to the construction of collective identities too. De Beauvoir (1949), while regarding the relation with the

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Other as a real category of the thought, cannot avoid seeing it reflected in the social domain: “Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus, it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself” (p. 49). The relational nature of social identities that de Beauvoir highlights has been developed further in the field of sociology and social psychology, where the processes of construction of minority and majority identities are often seen in terms of oppositions. Andrew Okolie (2003) notes that, if groups define themselves in relation to others, it is because identity has little meaning, without the “other”. “So, by defining itself, a group defines *others*” (p. 2), identities claims, precluding to expectations of gain or loss, reward or punishment, material or symbolic, manifesting power differentials, and hierarchies among social groups.

The above pose the following questions, can the relation with the Other not be conflictual? Must the relationship with the ‘Them’ be constitutionally oppositional? Papadopoulos (2002) pointed out that the relationship with the ‘Other’ implies a multiplicity of different attitudes. While the Other defines everything is not ‘this’ or, anything or anybody which is not ‘me’ or ‘we’ - the relationship with the ‘this’ and the ‘other’ includes a range of possibilities “from opposition to complementary, from difference, separation, distinction to alternative, remaining, supplementary” and yet “this wide range of potential relationships is not always kept in mind” (p. 165). Papadopoulos (2002), also, notes that Plato’s expression *alle psyche* (‘other soul’) is translated in English with the locution “the rest of the soul”, pointing out that, despite us using to stress the antagonistic, oppositional, hostile and conflictual meanings of the other, the latter should be better understood as part of a whole.

The *defending our borders* discourse signals that, Salvini chose to refer only to the separative meaning contained in the term border. In so doing, however, he also, chose



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to stress only one of the meanings connected with the stranger, the one related to the *tremendum* aspect of the *Other*.

In other words, I suggest, that, while between the Self and the Other a multiplicity of relationships and positions are possible (from difference, separation, distinction to alternative, remaining, supplementary) – as noted by Papadopoulos, Salvini chose to refer to the antagonistic, conflictual and oppositional one, by constructing migrants as part of an out-group opposed to the in-group - made up of by himself and all the Italian people.

The concept of ‘ontological state’ of *otherness*, first conceptualised by Václav Havel (1983), might be useful to understand Salvini’s positioning of the *cultural Other*. The Czech statesman, politician and artist, noticed that, while Being emerges from the **chasm** between Being and the wider context, the chasm originates the ontological state of otherness. This state of separation between us and the other, if accepted, opens up the opportunity of exploring two realms, an internal realm and an external one. The paradox that lies at the core of relationship of individuals with their internal and external other/s is that is not unique or one-sided, as it comprises connection and separation, similarities and differences. Wrestling the “thorny issues” posed by this relation is what makes a life meaningful.

Salvini oversimplifies the relationship with the other external, by constructing a discourse, “*reducing what can be distinguished into what must be separated*”, to say it with Pacioni (2016, p. 22, emphasis added). As mentioned in chapter 2, Pacioni identifies a “*paradigm of separation*” to refer to a discourse in a Foucauldian sense, where the entire political dimension of humanity (social relationships, history, biographical events) is perceived as a dimension external to individual identity. By constructing the individual as separated from history and context, bio-techno-science

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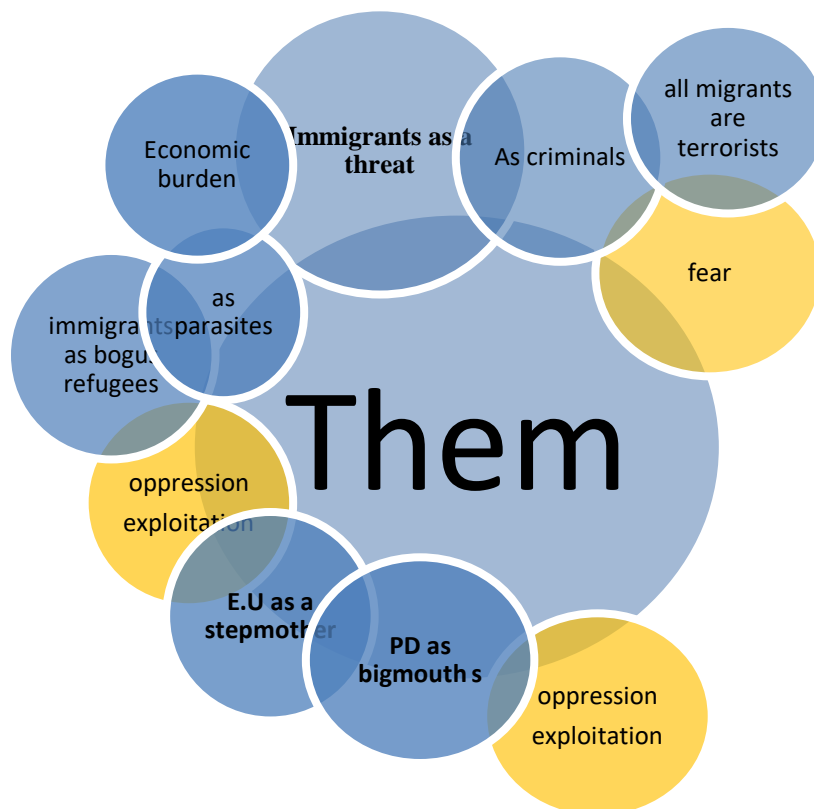
renders human identity increasingly rigid and onesided. In other words, by activating the “*paradigm of separation*” (Pacioni, 2016) within a Foucauldian Us and Them discourse, Salvini facilitates the emersion of the *tremendum* aspect of the other, at the expense of the *fascinans* one, constellating the shadow archetype.

While Jung failed to provide a clear-cut definition of the shadow (Casement, 2006), it is generally believed that he regarded it as the repository of the unwanted aspects of personality - comprising all those negative characteristics felt as unacceptable by an individual, and rejected in the unconscious. Like everything that is unconscious, these contents are easily projected outside, namely, attributed to other people/animals/situations. However, as noted by Casement (2006), when the shadow is being lived through projection, “the outer world becomes a replica of the person’s unknown side” (p. 98). Jung identified, also, a collective shadow, whose more dramatic historical example was Nazism, when its members projected a collective shadow onto the Jews, shaping them as inferior, and evil beings that should be exterminated. The collective shadow varies, according to the culture where it manifests itself, as what is rejected or felt as unacceptable varies according to the places and the times. The shadow, however, might contain positive elements too, contents that were repressed, deemed incompatible with the values of an individual, or of those considered important in their social context, might emerge, eventually, to compensate for overly one-sided attitudes of individual or collective conscience. I argue that, a split negative shadow is projected on migrants, while Salvini assumes onto himself, some features, and traits that might be interpreted as a positive collective shadow. I shall return on this point later in this work.

It is worth noting that, *E.U. as stepmother* is among the actors framed as persecutors within the *dialogical network*. I argue that, by uttering this discourse, Salvini is trying

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to constellate a negative maternal complex, whose core element of is the maternal archetype. This interpretation is supported by the many images circulating in the public sphere portraying the E.U. as a “Mother” (see the appendix, pictures 5 and 6). As suggested by Jung (1980), the mother archetype appears under infinite variety of aspects, for instance, from the perspective of a single individual, manifesting itself as personal mother and grandmother, **stepmother**. The goddess, as the Mother of God, the Virgin, and Sophia also are included among maternal archetypal images, as well as the Paradise, the Kingdom of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, but also things which arouse devotion or feelings of awe as “the Church, university, city or **country** [...]” (p. 15). As with all archetypes, these symbols and the qualities associated to them can have a favourable or an evil meaning. The symbols of the *loving mother* (Jung, 1980) are maternal solicitude, a spiritual exaltation which transcends reason to reach wisdom, all that foster growth and fertility, all helpful instincts and benign impulse. Symbols of the *terrible mother* (Jung 1980) are “the tomb, the sarcophagus, the deep waters, death”, but also “that which devours, seduce, intoxicated, that which generates, distressing, the inevitable” (p.83). In synthesis, the negative mother complex is expression of what is suffocating, devouring, which prevents development and autonomy- namely E.U’ s attitude toward Italians. It is not difficult to recognize these characteristics in the way Salvini depicts the E.U’s attitude toward Italians: a distant entity that with its insistent economic demands, it prevents Italy's autonomy and economic development.



Graph 3 – The ‘Them’ polarity of the Us and Them discourse

Graph 3 – The ‘Them’ polarity of the Us and Them discourse

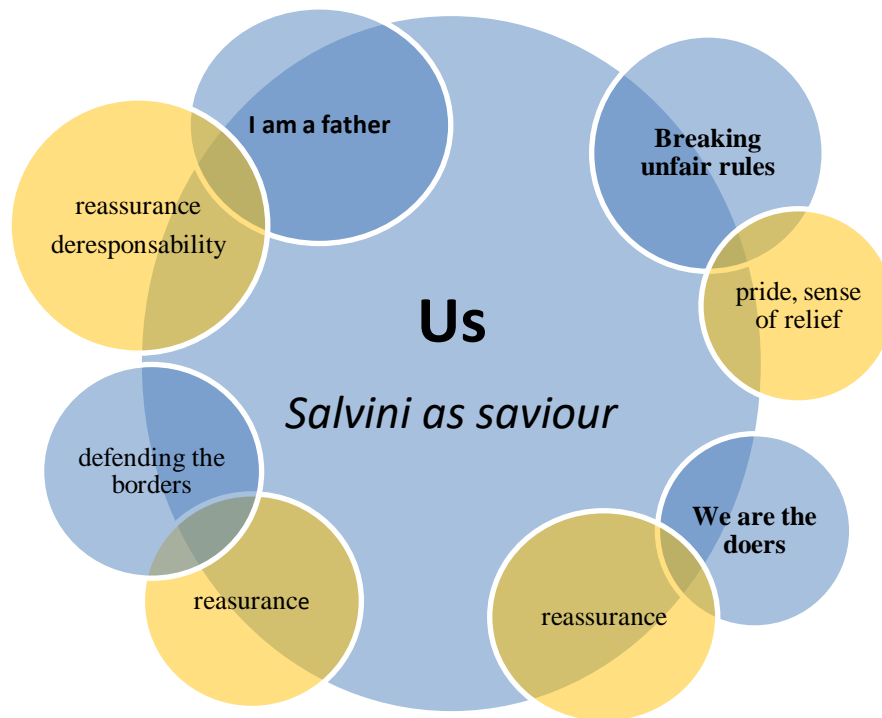
As mentioned during the analysis of the texts, the Us pole, at a certain point of his speeches, loses cohesion to split into the Italian people on one side, and Salvini on the other. The conventional discourses which I identified as associated to Salvini and his allies are:

*I am a father; we are the doers; breaking unfair rules.* I argue that, Salvini, here, is trying to constellate the saviour archetype and triggering saviour projections on himself. His continuous references to his concreteness, ability to solve problems (*We are the doers*), and commitment to defending the safety of citizens (*Defending our borders*) must be considered in this perspective. As Papadopoulos (2021)

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highlights, according to the dictionary (OED) the meaning of rescue is to “ deliver or save (a person or a thing) *from* some evil or harm” (p.191). His positioning as responsible, authoritative, capable of providing for the needs of Italians, and of defending them from impending threats, recalls paternal qualities and functions. This interpretation is supported by Salvini’s continuous reminding the reader/listener that he is a father, and recounting episodes of real life with his children, and showing them with him on Facebook live broadcasts, at times.

The saviour figure, however, does not encompass just peaceful and reassuring aspects. As stressed by Papadopoulos (2021), rescuing may involve violence, as proved by the origin of the verb to rescue . In fact, “to rescue” derives from re-excuss “which refers ‘to shake off, cast off, get rid of’, to shake out the contents of anything; hence to investigate thoroughly’, and also ‘to recover, take back by force” (p. 191). The discourse *Breaking unfair rules* seems to refer, precisely, to this aspect of the rescuer, that though less reassuring, it certainly can provide the victims with a certain feeling of liberation by constrains. In the context of Salvini’s speeches, these constrains are those imposed by E.U as a negative mother, which he is committed to break.



Graph 4 – The 'US' polarity of the Us and Them discourse – Salvini as a saviour.

### 5.2.2 Salvini as Persecutor: Laura Boldrini and Roberto Saviano

Having evoked the archetypal images of the Victim, the Persecutor and the Savior, , Salvini's interlocutors are unable to escape the victim's triangle (which will become a Diamond Victim with the entry of other actors), when they enter in the *dialogical network* activated by him. Attracted by the numinos ? power of archetype/s, acting as a filter between individuals and reality, they re-shape the discourses *breaking unfair rules* into what becomes *Respecting the Constituion and International laws*. The

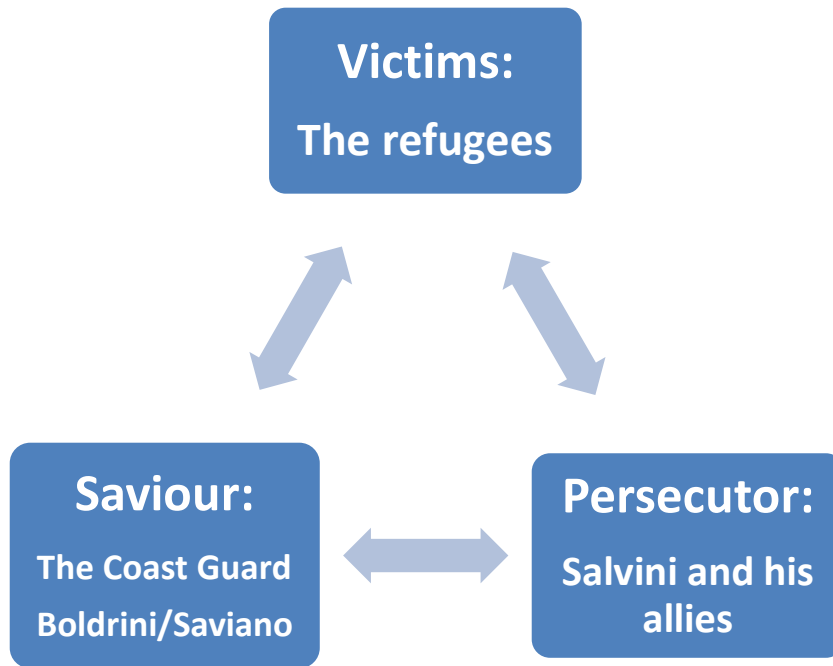
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reference to fascism, brought up by Saviano (4.E) and by Boldrini (5C) – point to the attempt to overturn the image of a good father put forward by Salvini, to let emerge the negative side of authority. After all, comparisons between Mussolini and Salvini continue to appear throughout his government, as the pictures in the appendix show (2, 3, 4). As Salvini has positioned migrants, and the élite – to which Boldrini and Saviano belong, among the persecutors, they need to counteract this positioning. Their interest is to render migrants acceptable to Italian public opinion - divided on immigration, and to remove themselves from the position of the persecutor where Salvini has located them. Victimising migrants serves both purposes. By depicting migrants as victims, the Italian people will be more willing to welcome new foreign citizens, and they who are advocating in their favour, will assume the saviour role. Advocacy can be considered to all intents and purposes a form of rescue, as Papadopoulos (2021) pointed out “Whereas rescuing is mainly associated with visible and dramatic acts of saving, from something dangerous or hostile, it is not limited to such observable acts. Advocacy and protection are forms of saving that may be long term and without easily demonstrable outcomes” (p.191). Obviously, the more horrible the persecutor is, the more likely it will be for the victims to be welcomed by the public opinion. Portraying Salvini as a persecutor also performs this function: by conceptualising his political action as outlaw and persecutory, their advocacy in favour of refugees may become more effective and persuasive. At a closer look, indeed, the features attributed to persecutors are really close to those embodied by Salvini, according to his detractors, but also to some of his supporters. Referring to the work of Bettelheim (1984), Papadopoulos (2021) pointed out that the perceptions of persecutors, includes antithetical images, like “one bloated with ignorance and sadism too? ...too? inferior to take pains with ...too radically corrupt

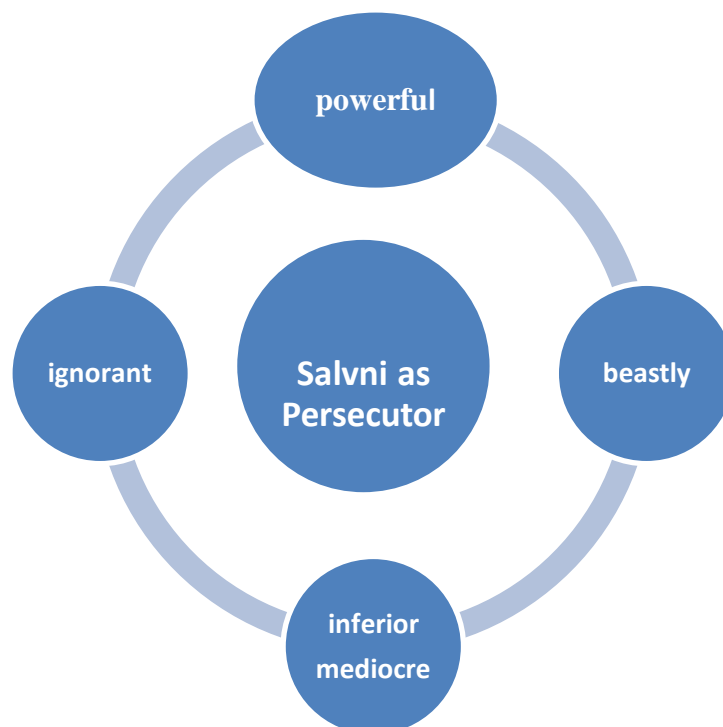
to be approached as a normal human beings”, but also one “exaggeratedly formidable and awe-inspiring, ‘too dangerous and too powerful’ confident, dominating...among hesitant mediocrities” (Bettelheim, 1948, p. 178, in Papadopoulos, 2021, p.189). There are many references to Salvini's ignorance, one example being the accusation of bringing the country back into the barbarism moved by by *Boabab experience* (text 3H).

	<b>Discourses</b>	<b>Salvini framed as:</b>
Boldrini	<i>Salvini as a criminal</i>	Kidnapper Subversive Criminal Bully Blackmailer
	<i>Refugees as victims</i>	
	<i>Respecting the Constitution and International laws</i>	
Saviano	<i>Salvini as a criminal</i>	Clown fascist
	<i>Refugees as victims</i>	
	<i>Respecting the Constitution and International laws</i>	





Graph 5 - Saviano and Boldrini ' Victim Triangle



## Chapter

### VI

## Conclusions

### 6.1 Final Conclusions

The goals of this work were threefold. First, to analyse the discourses on refugees which permeate the public sphere. The assumption underpinning this objective was that socially dominant discourses constrain *if* and *how* refugees can speak out their voices working as ready-made scripts (Shuman 2011), that refugees can draw upon or reject but can never ignore. Mapping out “these other shaping stories” (Shuman, 2011, p. 140), sheds light on the constraints that IDPs must face when negotiating their identities. My hypothesis was that, among ‘these shaping stories’, the discourse of the traumatised refugee occupies a privileged position, clouding all the other facets of the refugee experience. Second, to show that Papadopoulos’ (2021) *Victim Diamond* offers an effective model to understand *why* when talking about refugees, social actors cannot avoid reproducing the stereotypical pattern of the victim, the persecutor, and the rescuer, where refugees are positioned either as the victim - the

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*traumatised refugee*, or as the persecutor – the *refugee as a threat*. Also, I aimed at investigating *if* the audience –the witnesses or spectators of the Victim Drama – plays any role in introducing alternative, and in positive case, *under what conditions*. Related to the previous one, my third aim was to suggest that, by integrating Foucauldian discursive analysis with Jungian analytical psychology, some of the issues left unresolved by traditional discourse analysis, included Foucauldian oriented one, can be effectively dealt with.

### 6.1.1 The Diciotti case as a dialogical network

Following the analysis carried out in chapter 5, it possible to conclude that, the use of social media by politicians as Georgia Meloni, Matteo Salvini, Laura Boldrini, as well as by intellectuals and journalists as Saviano and Paragone confirms the “*reciprocal loop*” (Esser, 2014) between media and politics, conceptualised also with the expression “mediatization of politics” (Esser & Stromback 2014). They all convey their political stands through social media, adapting their messages according to the rules set by media. At the same time, they use media to increase their popularity, personalise their own message, and, above all, re-contextualise other media discourses. Also, they all do this through several different channels, as Facebook, Twitter, newspapers, television and radio broadcasts. This confirms Chadwick’s (2017) theory of *the media hybrid system*, according to which, *the new media system* evolves through mutual interactions between older and newer media.

The texts related to the Diciotti case appear thematically and interactively connected, thus forming a cohesive *dialogical network* (Leudar et. al, 2004, 2006, 2008; Leudar & Nekvapil, 2004; Nekvapil & Leudar, 2002). I resorted to the concept of dialogical

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network as it operationalises Chadwick's hybrid ontology, providing a methodological guide to analyse different type of texts. According to Leudar and Nekvapil, the cohesion of a dialogical network is provided by commonalities and contrast in lexicon, metaphors, themes and arguments, and "sequential structures similar to those observed in everyday conversations" (Nekvapil and Leudar, 2002), rather than by similarities in the genre of belonging. As evidence of what has been said, one should consider the recurring discourses centred on the themes of legality (*breaking unfair rules, respecting international treaties*), security (*defending our borders*), victimisation (*E.U as stepmother, migrants as a threat*), criminality (*illegal immigrants, Salvini as a criminal*), need of protection (*I am a father, they are human beings*). Furthermore, some texts are clearly located in a dialogical sequential structure, as those between Salvini and Saviano (3.A, 3.B., 3C., 3D), or those between Salvini and Boldrini (5.C- 6.A), where the actors enact a long-distance dialogue.

I suggest that Salvini and his allies initiate the dialogical network, as it can be inferred by the scarcity of the texts referring to the Diciotti case before Salvini's announcement of his ban of migrants' disembarking. The macro theme organising all of Salvini's speeches is the opposition between *Us* and *Them*. I argue that *Us and Them* can be considered as a discursive framework in Foucault's sense, for it organises a broad system of knowledge and practice, contributing to construct personalities and identities. I am not referring to the recognition of an otherness that distinguishes /distinguishes itself, from a Self in psychological terms. Rather to the hypostatisation of this relationship in a conflictual opposition, at the hands of a new bio-politics of bodies— in Foucauldian terms — as pointed by Pacioni (2016). If Pacioni is right when he identifies a new bio-politics of bodies based on the prevalence of *the paradigm of separation*, on that of *distinction*, and on the inversion

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of roles between *model* and *complexity*, then the relationship with the other can only be constructed as conflictual and oppositional, generating otherness with micro-power effects. As discussed in chapter 2, a new governance of bodies, aspiring to the *reductio ad unum*, and to the separation of the *neuro-living being* from their socio-cultural environment - from every *otherness* exceeding the brain – can only have as target the *stranger* who undermines every possible language of the *oneness* (Curi, 2010). Therefore, while the *stranger*, with his irreducible otherness, proposes a mode of reasoning based on et-et (both-and Us and Them discourses with its reassuring Western, rational logic of *aut –aut* (either-or) needs to be restored.

The structuring of the *Us and Them* discursive framework is supported by a number of *conventional discourses*. These are often repeated shared schemas, i.e. a discourses based on cultural models, simplifying an issue. As pointed out by Strauss (2012) herself, conventional discourses differ from Foucault's ones. While the latter articulate broad ideologies, unify knowledge and practices, and construct personalities and identities, the formers express specific schema, influence people, rather than constructing them, and can be shaped, to certain extent, by social actors. However, they are not in contradiction. A single discursive framework in Foucault's sense, in fact, can offer the taken for granted background, in which several conventional discourses can be located. Within the taken- for- granted oppositional relationship with otherness, at the base of the *Us and Them* discourse, I identified the following standardised discourses:

*Immigrant as a threat*; with its variants: the *bogus refugee*, the *immigrant as an economic burden*; the *immigrant as criminal*; the *Immigrant as bad parent*; the

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*Immigrant as parasites; all immigrants are terrorists; the E.U as stepmother; we are the doers: breaking unfair rules; I am a father;* uttered by Salvini and his supporters. *Respecting Conventions and International treaties; Salvini as a Criminal; They are human beings;* voiced by those who opposed Salvini's ban on migrants' disembark.

### **6.1.2. The Diciotti case as a Victim Diamond**

The findings reported above, confirm that the floating signifier of *the refugee* fluctuates between the two core themes of the victim and the persecutor, being temporarily fixed in the opposite stereotypical figures of the *refugee as a victim*, and the *refugee as a threat*. Traditional discursive methods can be fruitfully employed to detect these fluctuations and evaluate the effects in term of positioning and power - imbalances, between different social groups. However, these approaches do not help to account for the exact reasons why these themes are so widespread, and why people find so hard to counteract them. An explanation based only on the force of discourse – as a linguistic and historical construct - to shape people's identities, does not seem completely satisfactory. While Foucault's micro-physic of power is bound to extensive, but limited historical-cultural contexts, the stereotyping of the foreigner, according to the victim–persecutor pattern, recurs in contexts distant from each other in space and time. As shown in chapter 2, academic research on media representation of migrants proved that to “scapegoat, ‘stereotype’ and ‘criminalise’ migrant groups is a long -term trend in media (Philo et.al, 2013), and that a combination of empathy with suspicion “is an established pattern” (Chouliaraki et al, 2017, p.1163 in the representation of human mobility.

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It is worth noting that discourses do not explain why certain choices are made, rather they only set the range of imaginable options to social actors. As pointed out by Dunn & Neumann (2016), in order to analyse individual decision-making, discourse analysis needs to be supplemented by other methods, being aware, however, that in addition to methodological compatibility, “one should be sensitive to the possible existence of an epistemological divide on the issue of causality” (p. 61).

I suggest that this issue can be addressed whether the discourses within the dialogical network are analysed in light of the Victim Diamond. As discussed in chapter 2, Papadopoulos (2021) suggests that our understanding of phenomena and our behaviours are formed through an *epistemological cycle* (p. 13), consisting of three phases influencing each other, respectively called: *initial epistemological perspective; positioning; action*. Papadopoulos refers to the loss of the ability to process phenomena and experiences appropriately, when dealing with emotionally laded situations. This loss of fine understanding facilitates the development of a *victim identity*, resulting from the following epistemological mistakes: confounding events and experience of events; pathologizing survivors. These epistemological errors lead to confusion between being a victim of contingent circumstances, and developing a ‘victim identity’, one consisting in the following features: extension of the *status* and position of victim beyond appropriate context and time; domination of the victim identity over all aspects of the individual's life; sense of entitlement and a demanding attitude on the part of the victimised person; negative response from others who see the victimised person always using their victim position. Whenever victimisation occurs, people tend to play a set of stereotypical roles, involving a persecutor, a rescuer, and a victim, whose pattern of exchanges keeps being repeated. This ‘Victim Triangle’ (p.187) can be expanded to include a fourth participant, the

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audience that can be defined as the witnesses, or the spectators in front of whom the ‘Victim triangle’ is enacted. They are people close to the main actors but also all those who engage in different ways with the drama. The audience can witness silently or taking the floor, although, regardless of their behaviour, they impact on the drama with their presence. Having included the audience in the drama, Papadopoulos (2021) proposes that the diagram of the Victim Triangle needs to be amended in that of the Victim Diamond (p.196). The Victim Diamond can be conceptualised as an *Interactional matrix* where the stereotypical interactions among participants should be accepted as being of *archetypal* nature (Papadopoulos, 2021, p. 192).

As mentioned in the chapter 5, Salvini started the *dialogic network*. By applying Papadopoulos (2021)’s *epistemological cycle*, we can infer that his approach to migration was predetermined by the third sphere of action, namely, what he wanted to gain. It is reasonable to conclude that he wanted to maintain his power and to increase his own consensus. As he approached political communication in populist terms (Di Ciccio & Sensales, 2019), he needed to stigmatise an external ‘other’ to strengthen the image of an idealised population, fostering sense of belonging to an imaginary single community. As Salvini based his political campaign on anti-immigration themes, it was logic that his external other would have been migrants.

The anti-immigration discourse is, also, connected with anti-European, and anti-neoliberalist discourses. The figure of the ‘Immigrant’ evokes other persecutory figures, attracting and welding together discourses belonging to different domains of reality and oversimplifying political and economic issues that would require complex explanations to be effectively faced. By referring to the *problem of immigrants*, a number of problems affecting Italy – the economic crises, the relationship with European Union, the crises of the PD, the collapse of the pension system, the



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inefficiency of the reception system – are simplified by providing clear culprits to blame. The construction of the victim follows that of an external enemy. In fact, if the existence of an enemy ensures that of another subject with opposing interests. Where there are persecutors, there are victims who, in this case, are Italy and all Italians. Therefore, feelings of entitlement and self-righteousness are evoked for the reader/listener to be positioned in a victim positions. Following Papadopoulos' (2021) Victim Triangle model, a third figure, with the purpose of providing support to the victim, needs to be included here: the saviour. While Salvini shares the sufferings of Italians, he does not share their same passivity, as he is “the doer”, the one who can change the situation, and who can save Italians from these many dangers. He positions himself as the saviour.

In a similar way, Saviano's and Boldrini's interest, as Salvini's main opponents, is to counteract his stereotyping of the *Immigrant as a threat*, and to move away from the position of members of privileged elite, where Salvini had located them. This goal is achieved by victimising migrants. The *Migrant as victim* discourse covers two important functions: it renders migrants more acceptable to Italian public opinion, divided between those in favour of the *principle of the unconditional hospitality*, and those supporting the application of more restrictive norms; it allows Boldrini and Saviano to move away from the positions of members' of an elite to the one, more socially favourable, of the saviours. However, victimising refugees implies finding a persecutor, a role that is assigned to Salvini.

Papadopoulos' (2021) model of the *Victim Diamond*, also accounts for the reason why people are so easily ‘taken’ by the narrative of victimhood and cannot avoid embodying one of the stereotypical roles of the victim, the saviour and the persecutor.

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In fact, the stereotypical interactions among participants should be accepted as being of *archetypal* nature (Papadopoulos, 2021, p.192).

Archetypes are innate, hereditary dispositions that organise experience according to typical themes or patterns, that lay in the collective unconscious a deeper- universally shared- layer of the psyche. While *archetypes as such* are empty forms which are filled by contents provided by the socio-cultural environment of a society, an *archetypal image* (that does not consist only of visual content as the word image could suggest, but also of narratives), will be shaped by the *Zeitgeist*- the spirit of the time. While archetypes are bipolar, and express positive as well as negative meanings, in situations of strong polarisation, we tend to experience just one polarity of archetypes. Papadopoulos (2013) pointed out that, under the “blinding brightness of the unipolar archetype” (p.194), all the differences, interpersonal or intrapsychic, disappear. He used the expressions ‘archetypal dazzle’, ‘archetypal radiation’ and ‘archetypal whirlpool’ (Papadopoulos, 2013, p.194) to explain the irresistible fascination, exerted by the purity of an unipolar archetypal image, whose power grips individual and groups. Not surprisingly, almost all the actors in the networks have been taken by the *archetypal radiation* exerted within the Victim Triangle. There are, certainly, some differences between the participants in the network. Paragone for instance (Text 7. A) was more inclined to shape E.U. as the persecutor, and less interested in stigmatising refugees as a danger. He invested more in the *E.U. as stepmother discourse*, rather in the *Immigrants as a threat* one, possibly because his party , *Movimento 5 Stelle*, relies on a strong ant-neo-liberalist rhetoric. Giorgia Meloni (1 A.), on the contrary, has always invested on the *Immigrant as a threat*, in line with her right –populist political background. Differences can be detected also among those opposing Salvini. MEDU’s narrative (6.C) - for instance, is much more focused

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on the victimisation of refugees than on the criminalisation of Salvini. Being its mission to provide care to victims, the existence of victims is an absolute requirement. Conversely, *Baobab experience* is more oriented to frame Salvini as a persecutor, as its political view is close to anarchism and opposed to formal political parties, and to authoritarianism in general. Despite the differences, however, almost no-one escapes the stereotypical patterns imposed by the Victim Triangle.

### 6.1.3 The audience

The first important question to address is who is the audience in this story? Audience is defined by Papadopoulos (2021) as witnesses, spectators of the ‘Victim triangle’ who can approve or disapprove the drama unfolding in front of them, by supporting some of the actors, or just by remaining silent. They are “people close to the main actors; friends, family members, etc., and also others engaging in a range of ways, especially nowadays, through social media” (p. 197). It was not easy to decide whether there was an audience in this network, and who, in case, was to represent it. I excluded all those belonging to a political party, as I felt that their political interests rendered them active actors of the network, rather than witnesses. I applied a similar reasoning to exclude those with a specific role within organisations and NGOs whose mission was supporting migrants and refugees. Their interests and commitment to the ‘cause’ of refugees located them in the saviour position. Part of the texts examined, were produced by journalists. Could journalists be considered part of the audience? It should be considered that in the 1990s, Italy experienced a change within the political system, referred to as *Second Republic*. The new political order emerged

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after a series of judicial inquiries, conducted in the first half of the nineties by various judicial prosecutors, revealing a fraudulent and corrupt system of collusion between Italian politicians and Italian entrepreneurs. This new phase of party development was characterised by the weakening of the mass parties of the *First Republic* and the emergence of ‘autonomous formations’ as Forza Italia (FI) and Lega Nord (LN) that “placed less emphasis on social roots and more on media presence and the replacement of ideology with loyalty” (Diamant, 2003, p.16, in: Geddes, 2008, p. 352). In this phase, the media played a major role, due to the characteristics of the electorate of Forza Italia (FI), the largest party of the centre-right. In fact, F.I.’s supporters are less interested in politics, and more influenced by the media and the personal appeal of the leader Silvio Berlusconi, who also happened to own *Mediaset*, a company specialising in television communication he had founded in 1978, and representing the first group of national private television networks able to rival the RAI public service. I believe that this change is still affecting Italian journalists, too often lacking neutrality, and too prone to framing news according to the political view of the newspaper employing them.

Finally, I considered those texts produced by Laviano (4.B) and Nellina Laganà (4.C) as part of the audience. Laviano introduces in the public sphere discourses that seem to stand outside the stereotyping activated by the Victim Triangle. He counteracts the closed port policy with the ‘open port’ narrative *Defending the borders* with ‘welcome’ and *immigrants as a threat* with ‘migrants as friends’ (16) and ‘migrants as human beings’ he avoids framing Salvini as a persecutor, and constructing migrants as victims. The common belonging to the human race is the ground allowing the recognitions of the other as an akin. In order to counteract the othering of the *Us and Them* discourse, he tries to construct a sense belongingness, overcoming any

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form of differences, rooted in the body (it can be felt in the gut 8) and symbolised by food. By framing migrants as guests, Nellina Laganà, refers to the Xènia, the Greek tradition of hospitality. She counteracts the *Defending our border* discourse by presenting the sea as the place where wealth comes from, placing the emphasis on the second meaning of term border – the one that unifies rather than separate. It can be concluded that, those who manage to escape the stereotyped pattern of the Victim Triangle, are those who does not cover institutional roles.

## **6.2 Limits of this work**

### **6.2.1 Data**

Primary data are defined as “original data collected for specific research goal” (Hox & Boeije, 2005, p. 593). Secondary data are those that have been already collected for research or information purposes, and are re-used or re-analysed to respond to a research question different from that of the original work (Heaton, 1998). Newspaper articles and Facebook posts can serve as primary as well as secondary data, depending on whether the text analysed reports events that have been collected first-hand. Articles reporting current events are more likely to be considered primary, while those that provide analysis of past events might be considered secondary. In some cases, it might prove challenging to decide whether a source is primary or secondary. In fact, “if an article provides a description of a past event along with fresh analysis, it is still considered a secondary source” (University of the Fraser Valley). While some of the articles analysed in this work are intended to merely report to the reader the occurrences of the Diciotti case, most of the sources used comprised texts where facts

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are accompanied by evaluations and interpretations of political or moral nature. I then consider them as secondary source. The adoption of secondary data prevents the risk of re-traumatising informants who end being repeatedly asked about their stories, though it presents, obviously, some drawbacks. The first one is the risk of neglecting migrants' genuine voices. As mentioned in this work, the refugees' narratives collected by humanitarian organisations and N.G.O are, often, structured around the discursive interests of these, and by their aim of fostering the empathy of the public opinion (Boltansky, 1993). Even when refugees speak in first person terms – under the pressures mentioned - they might be tempted to identify with the stereotype of 'the iconic victim' unknowingly. As a consequence, these sources cannot be viewed as representative of migrants' real experience, to grasp which more methodological care would be needed. While I explained the methodological and ethical reasons why I decided not to use qualitative interviews, and collect primary data, I still feel that not giving them a voice is major drawback of my work.

A second limit of this research is that five years have elapsed since I began collecting the data and the present Italian's political conditions is different.

However, this temporal gap has allowed me to develop sufficient distance to exert my reflexivity. The risk that an archetype - or a network of archetypes - underlying a discourse activates a complex is not restricted to the active or passive participants of a dialogical network, including the researcher too. As Jung wrote about his personal irritation while reading Joyce's *Ulysses*: "[...] irritation means: You haven't seen what's behind it. Consequently, we should follow up with our irritation and examine whatever it is we discover in our ill temper" (Jung, 1932a: par.168, in: Papadopoulos, p. 12). Distance allowed me to analyse my countertransference, namely, to observe my feelings, thoughts and general reactions to the sources. I acknowledged my

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irritation toward Salvini's statements on refugees, and my opinions about his cruel behaviour. I evaluated the possibility that I, myself was trapped in the 'Victim triangle', in the saviour position. My annoyance toward the stereotyping of the victim by the humanitarian discourse, also contributed to raise my awareness of the role I might have played in victimising migrants, when working in the field. The analysis of the countertransference, as noted by Papadopoulos (2012), is a form of epistemological awareness as "The attempt to trace back the origin and context of one's own assumptions is the essence of the epistemological procedure and this is what countertransference is about" (p.v12). In this respect, distance has helped my epistemological procedure. However, the change of political circumstances might have affected my interpretation. The ruling coalition at the time of the Diciotti case collapsed on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2019. For the data to be interpreted correctly, they need to be carefully contextualised.

### **6.2.2 The power of images and visual methodologies**

A substantial part of the sources examined comes from media and, a part, involves images. While a critical approach to media would include the consideration of the power of images and the shift of the forms of language adopted (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015), the limits of space required by this work, have prevented me from applying a critical visual methodology, able to account for the construction of

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meaning at the intersection of texts and images, and the new connections and understanding opened by “the use of signs and audio-visual devices, the use of sound and silence” (Livholts & Tamboukou 2015, p. 29).

Imagery is becoming increasingly influential, as new technologies allow for the development of communicative forms that employ images, signs and video. Images visualise social difference according to the way in which they are viewed. This suggests the power of images in fostering an intimate relationship between audience and images. Hall et al. (2013) advocate a constructionist approach taking into account meaning making through language, signs and images, to represent things. As a system of representation, meaning is established through different ways of organising, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, that is always an active process of translation. A body may use facial expression, clothing and fashion to symbolise particular meanings. Thus, language, signs, and images produce meaning interactively. Hall et al. (2013) argue that we need a conceptual map able to relate language to the visual and concepts to representation (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015 p. 84).

## **6.2 Sampling of sources**

CDA studies have been criticised for the/ir arbitrary selection of texts, seen to cast doubts on their representativeness, and for the analysis of a small number of texts or text fragments, that cannot be expected to reveal helpful patterns or insights into their frequency or distribution (see for example Stubbs 1994; 1997; Koller & Mautner



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2004). This limit could be prevented by using random sampling which “gives each element in the sampling universe an equal chance of being selected” (Zhao, 2014). However, my goal was not to represent the entirety of a universe, but to uncover the meanings produced in a specific and unique situation. Data generalisation was not among the goals of this research, so purposive sampling seemed the most suitable choice. Purposive sampling selects only certain elements that can respond to the research need and, in so doing, it seeks to represent only the dimensions that are of interest to the researcher. However, purposive sampling is not without limitations. The sample created relies solely on the researcher’s judgment and interpretations. The high level of subjectivity that this process implies can render difficult for researcher to justify the selection of the unit of analysis and the general representativeness of the sample. While I have been guided by a strong theoretical and analytical framework in the selection process, I still feel that these findings can be only generalised partially, to very similar situation in terms of socio-cultural and political context.

### **6.3 Suggestions for further research**

Papadopoulos (2021) pointed out that Victim Triangle is not a stable configuration. One set, it invariably “spins out of control” (p.195), sliding into chaotic configurations. These may include:

- A) Actor retains roles but act in more outrageously exaggerated forms
- B) The same actors assigned different roles, rendering the whole drama more confusing and destructive.

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- C) One of two of the three main actors are rejected by the configuration and the remaining actor/s recruit new actor/s for the missing roles.

While he provided a detailed theoretical and conceptual description of the dynamics raising the ‘Victim triangle,’ there are not many examples of practical applications of this model. This research filled this gap, focussing on a limited time frame. I suggest that additional research should be conducted, applying a longitudinal, rather than synchronistic perspective. Following the unfolding of the events for a longer period of time may confirm, disconfirm or expand the conceptual investigation offered by Papadopoulos, and offer a more detailed definition of the audience and its role.

Furthermore, more research involving refugees should be carried out. If we assume with Leudar et al. (2008) that discourses become resources that support refugees in managing the hostility toward them, this research design should be improved by integrating their voices. It is worth to mention that advocates, and refugees members of organisations, tend to restrict their public texts to humanitarian messages, emphasising the sufferings, to claim migrants’ legitimacy (Wroe, 2018). This suggests that, in addition to the analysis of published material, a methodological approach, based on participatory observation and informal chats in places attended by refugees, (organisations, NGOs, religious associations, i.e.) may disclose additional reliable information about *if*, and *how* the stereotypical representations of refugees are challenged or counteracted.

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