

FROM CIVIL SOCIETY TO THE LEVEL OF POLITICS: THE EVOLUTION OF  
NARRATIVES ABOUT MUSLIM IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

BY

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THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

In the European Union (EU), Islamophobia and hostile, racist discourse about Muslim individuals is no longer a characteristic of solely the far-right. Politicians and institutions from all parts of the political spectrum demonstrate an increased willingness to politicize everyday cultural encounters with Muslim immigrants that influences the social reality in which they live. This analysis examines discourse about Muslim immigrants in Italian society and the dominant narratives, or ways of thinking and talking about Muslims, that this discourse creates. Specifically, this analysis explores the characteristics of media and political discourse that drive dominant narratives about Muslim immigrants in Italy from the micro level of civil society to the macro, institutional level where they are transformed into policy proposal narratives that marginalize Muslim individuals. I maintain that narratives about Muslim immigrants that originate from the micro level of civil society are reflected in policy proposal narratives at the macro level. Using the framework of a metanarrative analysis, two narratives, which are deemed the 'their religious and cultural differences are a threat' narrative and the 'invasion and threat to public order' narrative, are deconstructed to determine the 'storylines' from the news media and the 'ideographs' in political discourse of which they are constructed. The 'storylines' and 'ideographs' that fuel the dominant narratives are based heavily in language characterized by public order, security, preservation of traditions, and the historical value of the Italian city center. While the analysis identifies stories and political language around which discourse about Muslims in Italy is articulated, it also provides a new way to think about discourse that marginalizes Muslim individuals and provides an opportunity for a more inclusive narrative to be put forth in EU society.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The motto of the European Union (EU), “united in diversity”, refers to the Union’s 27 member states that came together to promote peace and prosperity despite the different cultures, traditions, and languages that are an integral part of each individual country. It is questionable, however, how much this motto still resonates with its member states. Due to a relative increase in the presence of discussion and policies that marginalize Muslim individuals, the motto of the EU is put under scrutiny. Policies grounded in Islamophobia that suppress the ‘threat’ of Islam to the European public sphere complement anti-immigrant legislation of the past few decades. These policies, which originate at the level of civil society and are fueled by both politicians and the media, are damaging to the promotion of inclusion in European Union countries. The deconstruction and subsequent understanding of the discourses that motivate them reveal that hostile language targeted at Muslim immigrants in Europe takes many forms, from welfare abuse to public security concerns to a perceived cultural deterioration of the host country.

This thesis is concerned with the different forms of hostile language and discourse about Muslim immigrants in Italy, a country where in which Islam has turned into a political category. This analysis will examine the transformation of discourse about Muslim migrants from the level of civil society in Italy into policy narratives at the macro level. More specifically, the analysis will examine how media and political discourse drive dominant narratives that are reflected in policy narratives at the macro level. In order to better understand how religious and ethnic minorities and marginalized, this thesis will seek to answer the question: *what are the characteristics of media and political discourse that drives narratives about Muslim immigrants from the micro level of civil society to the*

*macro level of policy proposal narratives?* Using Italy as a case study, I will argue that narratives about Muslim individuals originating from micro conflicts at the level of civil society are reflected in policy narratives at a macro level.

The study will employ a metanarrative analysis to deconstruct narratives about Muslim immigrants into units of examination. While narratives about Muslims in other European Union countries will be highlighted, discourse present in Italian society and in the Italian media will be discussed in further detail. This will bring me to my ultimate goal of demonstrating how discourse about Muslim immigrants originates at the micro level of civil society and is transformed to discourse at the macro level of politics. This analysis will foster a better understanding of the symbols and ideas that stem from narratives about Muslim immigrants that are detrimental to the tolerance of minorities in European Union (EU) society. Moreover, the analysis will help policy analysts or the public to better understand the system of competing narratives about religious and ethnic minorities in European society and search for a counter narrative that offers greater acceptance.

As the population of the European Union continues to diversify, the maintenance of cooperation among 27 member states with different colonial histories, politics, languages, and religions has transpired into a real concern. Although EU policies are aimed to counter discrimination at the macro European level, the micro level cultural conflicts in its nation states, which are either salient or go largely unnoticed, occur on a daily basis. The product of the visible micro conflicts is an increased risk of a hasty response from the public or the government as individuals or groups see 'politics' in these cross-cultural confrontations. In essence, the 'politicization of culture', which stems from an either recognizable or unrecognizable source, ends up taking the news and capturing the public's attention.

Italy is a European Union member state in which cross-cultural confrontation is salient in news stories as well as political discourse. From the multi-local ordinance nicknamed the “Anti-Kebab” law to local regulations that govern the types of businesses that are allowed to operate in the city center, discourse about these policies, despite their small scale, appears to capture national media attention and reinforce the notion of ‘Islamophobia’ in the Italian public sphere.

My interest in this topic stems from research I completed as part of my graduate coursework that focused on the portrayal of immigrants in the Italian news media. My ultimate goal was to further examine and determine how news media discourse contributed to the securitization of immigration, or the transformation of immigration into an issue of public security, by invoking certain stories, ideas, or vocabulary. This analysis stems from an interest in the competing discourses about integration and exclusion that I observed in Italian news media and society. While political language promoting multiculturalism is present in Italian civil society, it is often overshadowed by news media discourse that reinforces the notion of the immigrant as an ‘other’. This study is motivated by the desire to examine how this type of discourse that ends up taking the news evolves from the micro level to a larger, more coherent narrative with a greater audience.

This analysis will provide a different way to understand the origins and implications of policy narratives about religious or ethnic minorities in Italian society. The metanarrative analysis framework can be used by policy analysts and claim-makers to better comprehend the variety of competing narratives about Muslim immigrants present in society. This framework paves the way for a new way of thinking about religious and

ethnic minorities while providing a window of opportunity for a new narrative to be put fourth.

## CHAPTER 2: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND QUESTION

### *Statement of Problem*

Muslims are the largest religious minority present in Western Europe (Cesari, 2005). As a result of globalization and historical factors, European cities have become important spaces for Muslim migrants to work and live (Cesari, 2005). Prior to the 1980s, Muslims in Europe were largely an 'invisible' group. During the 1990s, however, Europeans were confronted with their increased 'visibility', signifying the evolution of Islam from the private to the public sphere. More than ever, Muslims were faced with the obstacle of negotiating the personal articulation of their beliefs while circumventing the barriers put up by their host country (Cesari, 2005). This complicated the position of Muslim individuals trying to express their needs within European society.

Muslims were present in Europe long before the term Islamophobia was coined. Colonial relationships in France, for instance, paved the way for the arrival of North African migrants during the 1950s while both France and Italy opened their doors to economic migrants from predominantly Muslim countries after World War II and during the 1960s and 1970s. France, alone, was home to 1,600 mosques prior the 1990s (Adamson, 2011). In short, the presence of Muslims in the European public sphere is not a recent phenomenon. What is novel in the past few decades, however, is the shift towards the relative 'visibility' of Muslim individuals and the use of 'Muslim' as a category for mobilization and politicization (Adamson, 2011).

Prior to the 1980s, Islam was treated as a set of religious practices. Although these religious practices were still seen as a hindrance to integration into European society, Muslims were viewed as guest workers and temporary residents who would eventually



return to their home countries (Adamson, 2011). Their cultural and religious practices were not viewed as a 'threat' to the extent that they are today. The late 1980s and 1990s marked the shift from Islam as a set of beliefs to Islam as a separate identity category, distinguishing groups of migrants by religion instead of collective identification as "foreigners" in Europe (Adamson, 2011). Political factors such as the Iranian revolution and the Rushdie affair contributed to the visibility of the broader identity category; more notable, however, was the sudden willingness of individuals and politicians to politicize everyday cultural issues concerning Muslims with the purpose of challenging traditional structures (Adamson, 2011).

When Muslim migrants evolved into a 'visible' identity category, discourse followed suite. The sudden visibility of mosques, businesses owned by immigrants, or symbols associated with Islam facilitated the creation of common narratives about Muslim migrants; many individuals could not explain why they had become present so 'suddenly'. Maussen (2007) deems this time the "period of citizenship", where the visible presence of Islam in society became an extremely controversial issue in contrast to the "period of invisibility" where they went largely unnoticed.

Although the state may advocate for racial and social issues, contradictory measures stemming from discourse about Muslim immigrants is still produced on both the micro and macro levels of society (Fernandes and Morte, 2011). Exclusionary or hostile discourses evidenced at the larger, European level are also found at the local level where the discourse is transformed and reflected in national or institutional proposals and practices (Riccio, 1999). Discourse, in the sense of "culture talk", about Muslim migrants politicizes religion

and culture, reinforcing the notion of Muslim migrants as a political category or 'question' that warrants a policy response (Mamdani, 2000).

Discourse that marginalizes Muslim immigrants often links them to social, cultural, criminal, or economic problems present in the European public sphere. Although previous research has shown that the extreme anti-immigrant stance is principally a characteristic of the far-right, the European political landscape is not evolving in this direction. A larger portion of the European public and mainstream politicians are adopting negative views towards religious and ethnic minorities (Sinno, 2013). Dominant ways of thinking and talking about Muslim migrants are exhibited in the media, linking Muslims to emotionally salient topics, such as crime, culture, and the economy which disregards reality while capturing public attention (Sinno, 2013).

If this discourse becomes hegemonic and is used as language to talk and think about religious and ethnic minorities, there would be many implications for Muslim individuals in EU society. Not only would Muslims become marginalized in respect to the European public, but the discourse could influence local or national policies and present Muslims with more limited opportunities (Sinno, 2013).

Narratives about Muslims are linked to confusion about the different social realities in which an individual participates. Racist and hostile language becomes a product of overlapping or reoccurring discourses about different interactions with Muslim immigrants that shapes how society talks about religious and ethnic minorities (Riccio, 1999). Civil society, at the micro level, and institutions, at the macro level, participate and identify with this discourse; it is unclear, however, where the discourse originates and the symbols or ideas that perpetuate it. In addition to marginalization, dominant narratives

that exhibit racism towards religious and ethnic minorities are problematic because they can influence policy proposals or call for government response. Deconstruction of these narratives would serve as a valuable tool for policy analysts and claim-makers alike. Not only would it reveal the way that claims about religion and culture are reflected in policy narratives and perpetuated by the media, but it would present a more comprehensive view of the power of media discourse and the societal ramifications if these narratives continue.

### *Research Question*

In order to understand the creation of dominant societal narratives that marginalize religious and ethnic minorities as well as the mechanisms for producing shared discourses, this analysis will seek to answer the question:

***What are the characteristics of media and political discourse that drives narratives about Muslim immigrants from the micro level of civil society to the macro level of policy proposal narratives?***

Using Italy as a case study, I will argue that discourse about Muslim immigrants that originates at the micro level of civil society evolves into policy narratives at the macro level and is perpetuated by media and political discourse.

### *Significance of Research*

This analysis will provide a different way of understanding the origins and development of policy narratives that marginalize religious or ethnic minorities in Italian society. The metanarrative analysis will serve as a framework that can be used by policy analysts and claim-makers to better comprehend the variety of competing narratives present in Italian or greater European Union society. Moreover, deconstruction of these narratives could pave the way for a new way of thinking and talking about religious or

ethnic minorities. By viewing how policy tools respond to different narratives, it will be more evident how discourse at multiple levels of society can work to marginalize minorities and hinder opportunities for integration. According to O'Brien, narratives and the ideas embedded within have to power to counteract positive images about minorities (2011). Understanding these narratives and their sub-units will help policy analysts and claim-makers to more adequately formulate counter-narratives that contribute to policy alternatives that do not implicate or 'other' religious and ethnic minorities. While this analysis will not offer a specific solution or alternate narrative about Muslim minorities in Italian society, it will offer a different perspective on how to study policy discourse using narratives as units of analysis. This could serve as a model for how policy makers view the gravity of concerns about religious and ethnic minorities prior to disseminating their own political views.

### CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Defining 'Narratives', 'Discourse', 'Micro conflicts', and 'Public Sphere'*

Prior to providing the background information that will serve as the context for this analysis, the terms 'discourse', 'narrative', 'micro conflicts', and 'public sphere' will be defined. These terms will be explained for the purpose of outlining the parameters of the analysis and to define the terminology that will be used to discuss the metanarrative analysis.

Broadly speaking, discourse is defined as written or spoken communication or debate. Discourse can also be a set of statements that provides the framework and speech for talking or thinking about a specific subject (Riccio, 1999). Discourses, which are tied to social relations and specific experiences, do not function or develop autonomously and do not work alone (Riccio, 1999). Ideas embedded within discourse are connected to societal concerns, especially in reference to migration and religious identity. Sinno employs the term 'discourse' to indicate the corpus of statements about minorities intended for public consumption, specifically by politicians, media figures, journalists, or activists with an online presence (2013). Discourse about religious and ethnic minorities does not have to be hegemonic for it to influence thought or action. Discourses can provide 'background noises' that motivate thoughts or actions (Riccio, 1999). In this analysis, discourse will be defined as the broad set of statements, whether written or spoken, about a specific topic that influence how an event or subject is perceived. Specifically, discourse will emanate from news papers, magazines, or discussion at the micro and macro levels of society.

A 'narrative', on the other hand, takes the form of a 'story'. According to Jones and McBeth, "a narrative is a story with a temporal sequence of events unfolding into a plot,

populated by dramatic moments, symbols, and characters” (as cited in O’Brien, 2011). In other words, a narrative is a body of different discourses that make up a larger story. Different discourses feature various types of individuals, events, and ideas. In this analysis, a narrative will be featured as the largest unit of analysis and different discourses will make up its larger message, or story. The narrative in question will consist of a body of different discourses about Muslim migrants in Italian society. The sub-units, or parts that make up the discourses in the narrative, will be identified in the methodology section of the analysis. According to the United States Army/United States Marine Corps Intelligence in Counterinsurgency Field Manual, a narrative is a form of culture and is the most important for counterinsurgents to understand (Petraeus, Amos, Nagl, & Sewall, 2006). According to the manual, “a cultural narrative is a story recounted in the form of a casually linked set of events that explains an event in a group’s history and expresses the values, character, or self-identity of the group” (Petraeus et al., 2006). In other words, narratives reflect notions from the past that provide more information about the ideology or identity of the group in question. In this analysis, narratives will reflect concerns rooted in the identity and history of Italian individuals. Furthermore, narratives serve as the means through which different sets of beliefs and values are expressed and taken in by members of society (Petraeus et al., 2006). Narratives can help to explain why certain events begin, occurred, or ended in the way they did; however, narratives do not necessarily match historical facts. Historical facts can be simplified or reduced to express perceived cultural values (Petraeus et al., 2006). In this analysis, narratives about Muslim immigrants in Italy will be problematic when perceptions or beliefs about Muslims are drastically simplified. Hostile discourse about Muslims in Italy is created when civil society or politicians do not explore the wider

migratory phenomenon in which Muslim immigrants are situated. Moreover, the manual holds that counterinsurgents can identify a society's core values by finding and listening to the narratives present in society (Petraeus et al., 2006). While this analysis is not concerned with revealing Italy's core values, narratives will be especially helpful in pinpointing the beliefs or values around which hostile discourse about Muslims is articulated.

Next, the term 'micro conflicts' will be deployed at different points in the analysis to describe conflicts that originate at the level of civil society. In this analysis, a micro conflict, in a cultural or religious sense, will be defined as a confrontation occurring between two individuals, a group of individuals, or entities at the level of civil society. A micro cultural conflict is different than a 'macro conflict' in that a macro conflict occurs at the institutional level, is more salient, and impacts a larger group of people. Micro conflicts will be events of interest in this analysis as they have the potential to lead to macro conflicts or serve as the root of a policy narrative at the macro level. It is important to distinguish between micro and macro categories in order to differentiate the level of society on which narratives about Muslim minorities occur.

Finally, the term 'public sphere' will be used. According to Habermas (1962), a public sphere is a sphere of private individuals who join together to form a 'public'. The public sphere has a long history that originated during the age of enlightenment in the 1800s but is still relevant in modern times (Habermas, 1962). Habermas emphasizes the 'public use of reason' as a feature of the public sphere where individuals could keep state dominance in check (1962). The 'public use of reason' was exercised in rational-critical debates at institutions or in salons during the 1800s among the educated and literary

public (Habermas, 1962). Habermas also holds that civil society interprets the public sphere through the concept of 'public opinion' where the private sphere eventually collapsed and state and society become involved in each others' spheres (1962). The public sphere as it is known today developed as a result of the bourgeois reading public and the private institution of the family where discussion about literature was possible for the first time. The public sphere, in the modern sense, remains an inclusive place for civil society to articulate its interests and keep the dominance of governmental institutions in check (Habermas, 1962). Furthermore, Habermas holds that when communication occurs in a large public space or among a large number of individuals, specific mediums are used to transmit the information and influence the receivers (1962). The media works to manufacture consensus and create a 'public'. Newspapers, magazines, and television are mediums utilized in the public sphere to share and receive information.

In this study, the public sphere will refer the space in European or Italian society in which an individual interacts with others or encounters discourse intended for public consumption. The analysis will refer to the public sphere when discussing the space in which different discourses or narratives are introduced or consumed by society. In particular, the public sphere will represent the space in which discourse about religious or ethnic minorities is exchanged as well as the place where identity formation occurs. Racialized interactions between Muslim immigrants and the European public, for instance, can influence the identity maintenance or formation of either minorities or non-minorities. If an individual is exposed to public discourse that reinforces or denounces stereotypes about religious or ethnic minorities, the social reality in which they live evolves.

*Muslim Immigrants in Western Europe – A History of Migration*



In order to understand how discourse about Muslim migrants at the level of civil society is reflected in macro level narratives and perpetuated by media and political discourse, it is crucial to understand the historical context in which narratives about Muslims in Western Europe are situated.

There are approximately 16 million Muslims in Europe today (Adamson, 2011). While the history of migration in European countries is nation-specific, broadly speaking, the presence of Muslim individuals in Western Europe can be traced back to the end of World War II. This discounts the presence of indigenous Muslims who have been living in Europe for centuries, especially in Eastern Europe. While the end of World War II does not mark their initial arrival to Europe, this period was characterized by notable changes in migratory flows that shaped the demographic makeup of Western European countries. During the 1950s, European decolonization contributed to an influx of migrants arriving to European countries. France, for instance, received a large number of immigrants from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (Adamson, 2011). Additional immigrants arrived in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s due to a demand for labor. These economic migrants, or 'guest workers', arrived from predominantly Muslim countries (Adamson, 2011). European governments did not foresee the economic migrants staying in Europe; as temporary guest workers, Europeans viewed these individuals as immigrants who would eventually return home to their families (Adamson, 2011). As evidenced today, however, that was not the case.

#### *Immigration in Italy – Historical Context*

Unlike the history of migration in other Western European countries, the migration of Muslims or individuals from predominantly Muslim countries to Italy is a relatively

recent phenomenon. Prior to the 1970s, Italy was primarily a country of emigration. During the 1970s, however, a shift occurred, marking the gradual arrival of Muslim individuals to conform to the structure and demand of Northern Italy's job market (Saint-Blancat & Schmidt di Friedberg, 2005). According to Caritas, an Italian catholic-based non-governmental organization, Muslim migrants are composed of 1/3 Moroccans, followed by Albanians, Tunisians, Senegalese, and Egyptians. Italy is also home to large groups of Nigerians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Algerians.

Italy is a case study for the power of the informal economy. Like other European countries who rely on cheap labor, Italy needs an unorganized labor force who will accept any type of working conditions to facilitate the success of its economic endeavors (Riccio, 2002). While Italy is aware of its need for cheap labor, several characteristics, such as a lack of social services, housing problems, inequality, and a lack of integration between regions, create a contradiction between Italy's need and the reality of the accommodations that can be extended to these individuals (Riccio, 2002).

Although the African, Middle Eastern, or Eastern European immigrants arrived in Italy in different time periods or were a part of different migratory flows, the struggles they faced were largely the same. Confrontation was common when local or national governments attempted to solve these problems. Housing, for instance, was a concern for both Senegalese immigrants and the local government of Ravenna during the early 1990s. When the government moved Senegalese immigrant groups from their then current lodging to a place that was deemed more 'suitable', perceptions of the Senegalese as 'dirty' individuals who did not have similar hygiene standards emerged (Riccio, 2002). When this problem of representation in the news media emerged, discourse about these individuals

turned increasingly more hostile. Although the problem of representation stemmed from the media, Italian policies of reception and accommodation augmented rather than ameliorated the problem.

### *Religion in Italian Society*

Compared to more secular European countries, Italy, as a nation state, has weaker secularity where the separation of church and state is not as profound (Salih, 2009). Italy does not have an official religion; rather, agreements between the Catholic church and the state provide for a special status and privileges for the Vatican (Kuru, 2008). According to article three of the Italian constitution, all religions have equal status under the law. Article eight holds that all religious denominations have the right to organize and govern themselves. The constitution forbids the imposition of limitations on religious groups due to their character of their beliefs. Italy is one of the “secular exceptions” in Europe, meaning Catholicism is largely present while other religions negotiate a place on the periphery (Salih, 2009). Hospitals, research, universities, and media, are, to some extent, run or contributed to by catholic groups. Prior to 1984, the official religion of Italy was Catholicism; during this year, Italy, at least legally, assumed a more secular stance (Salih, 2009).

In contemporary Italian society, the Catholic church is vying to reassert itself in the Italian public sphere. Catholicism does not inform the beliefs or actions of every Italian citizen, but it is very much engrained in Italian culture (Salih, 2009). Tensions between religious minorities and the state assume a different form; the presence of a non-Christian religion in Italy was, and is to an extent, seen as having the potential to threaten the values and influence of the Catholic faith (Salih, 2009). According to Saint-Blancat & Schmidt di

Friedberg (2005), the Vatican is thus split between “a position of openness towards inter-faith dialog and its fear of losing a monopoly at the heart of the Italian religious space”.

### *Islamophobia in the European Public Sphere*

Islamophobia is a term that dates back to the early 1990s to describe the irrational fear of Muslims. Competing discourses and narratives inform notions about Islamophobia in society today. On one hand, scholars hold that Muslims experience relatively less difficulty co-existing in Western European countries than in the past, citing the decrease in tensions surrounding mosque construction and asserting that future construction will not be denied (Cesari, 2005). In France, for instance, Islam has started to become an accepted element of society; in nearly every locality, representatives of Muslim organizations communicate and collaborate with local French authorities (Cesari, 2005). Public discourse reflected in the media, however, paints a different picture. Stories about the banning of ‘burqinis’, a name given to swimwear worn by Muslim women, from public swimming pools or complaints about the abundance of ethnic food shops that result in a ‘loss of national culture’ populate the news media. The resulting Islamophobia that stems from the politicization of cultural practices is experienced at the level of day-to-day life.

### *‘Invisibility’ versus ‘Visibility’*

This analysis will use the terms ‘invisibility’ and ‘visibility’ to discuss two key periods during which Muslim presence was either smaller and overlooked or larger and more salient. Maussen refers to the ‘period of invisibility’ and the ‘period of citizenship’ as the periods in which Muslim immigrants were either ‘invisible’ or ‘visible’ in society, respectively. Being Muslim during the period of ‘invisibility’, however, does not signify that Muslims were literally hidden from view; rather, refers to the time where the presence of

Muslim migrants was less salient in Italian society. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Islamic practice was largely hidden from view (Maussen, 2007). Muslim migrants confined religious practice to prayer rooms located in the basements of apartment complexes or in the back of shops, largely hidden from the view of the public. Furthermore, mosques were not a common sight in the Italian public sphere. After the late 1980s and early 1990s, Maussen refers to Muslim migrants as living during the 'period of citizenship'. During this period, Muslims became permanent residents of Western Europe. Western European governments developed new politics and policies to govern immigration and the integration of newcomers (Maussen, 2007). Naturalization laws as well as social and political rights were discussed, and the incorporation of cultural and religious minorities into European society became a pertinent issue (Maussen, 2007). Unlike the time period where Muslims were largely invisible to society, the presence of Muslim immigrants and symbols associated with Islam, such as mosques or minarets, became extremely controversial (Maussen, 2007).

Riccio, for instance, references the 'invisible groups' of Muslims from Tunisia and Morocco in Rimini, Italy between 1974 and 1984 (1999). While literally visible to the public, these seasonal summer workers, who were either fisherman or street-sellers, were small in number and seen as temporary workers who would return to North Africa. Between 1985 and 1989, however, groups of Muslim migrants gained greater visibility. Rimini, whose economy is based on tourism and leisure activities, witnessed its first wave of immigration. More Moroccan, Tunisian, and even Senegalese and Brazilian migrants arrived to participate in, and take advantage of, the demands of local tourists (Riccio, 1999). Between 1990 and 1995, the presence of other ethnic groups became evident in the Italian

seaside town (Riccio, 1999). Immigrants found themselves the subjects of hostile discourse and inaccurately represented by the local people, especially local shopkeepers who were angered by the street-sellers who sold merchandise for low prices without work permits and tax payments. During this period of extreme visibility, the local press played a fundamental role in creating a threatening image of immigrants without considering the external factors relevant to the migratory phenomenon (Riccio, 1999).

The period of citizenship and extreme visibility is especially problematic for immigrants. While integration policies and reception protocol were subjects of policy discourse, they were also accompanied by racist discourse and portrayed migration and integration as a problem that warranted a policy response.

There are striking societal contradictions that become evident when comparing the narratives that emerge about religious and ethnic minorities to the reality of their visibility in the European public sphere. The discourse surrounding the 'arrival' of Muslims and their sudden visibility in the European public sphere contradicts the reality of their history of immigration. Muslims have been living in European countries, such as France and Italy, where prayer rooms have been present since their early arrival. Prior to the 1980s, Muslims, however, lived largely under the radar. In Italy, for instance, their 'visibility' in the 1990s sparked conflicts about mosque construction in the Italian landscape. During the 2000s, Muslim cultural centers with attached prayer rooms were still wrongly perceived as mosques by local Italian populations (Saint-Blancat & Schmidt di Friedberg, 2005). In short, the discourse that is based on the 'Muslim invasion' narrative is based on perceptions that ignore historical context.

*'Muslim': A Political and Identity Category*

The emergence of 'Muslim' as a political category or group around which discourse is focused is a relatively modern construct (Adamson, 2011). According to Adamson, the state and Muslim individuals alike have increasingly used 'Muslim' as an indicator of identity (2011). This identity marker prevails over other identity categories; rather than stating that an immigrant comes from Asia, North Africa, or is Turkish or Pakistani, those who practice Islam are all considered Muslims (Adamson, 2011). In essence, religion prevails over national identity. Groups that were once labeled based on national origin, socioeconomic status, or race are progressively identified solely in religious terms (Brubaker, 2013). Within different national, racial, and ethnic categories, Muslims possess different types of beliefs, from being atheist and 'culturally Muslim' to Islamist (Kuru, 2008). In other words, Muslim individuals exist along a wide spectrum.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Islam was treated as a religious belief or practice. From the late 1980s and early 1990s, 'Muslim' as an identity category became more prominent (Adamson, 2011). Maussen distinguishes between Muslims and the 'people who had Islam as their religion' who traveled or stayed in Europe in the early 1900s, such as representatives of Muslim states, merchants, workers, or armies from colonized countries (2007). The shift from 'those who have Islam as their religion' to the 'Muslim' identity category contributed to the evolution of Islam as a major boundary marker in European society (Adamson, 2011). The presence of discourse about Muslim individuals renders the word 'Muslim' a term that is used for convenience; it is not always thought of in the religious sense, rather, "refers to an identity that may have religious, racial, political, or cultural dimensions and is often externally imposed on those who are perceived to be members of the group" (Sinno, 2013). Sinno holds that it is not logical for society to assume

that individuals of Muslim faith or culture share political or policy opinions, asserting that being 'Muslim' means different things whether one is connected to the faith, culture, or any of the other interpretations (2013). While these boundaries may seem blurred to outsiders, the diversity of Muslim individuals defies generalizations made by the media and society (Sinno, 2013).

When writing about or discussing religious or ethnic minorities in European Union countries, it is essential to critically reflect on the categorization that is employed. According to Brubaker, "Muslim is both a category of analysis and an increasingly salient-and contested" category of social, political, and religious practice"; it becomes paramount to remain critical towards the categories that are used (2013). Studying religious or ethnic minorities based on the assumption that the group in question holds certain religious or political beliefs can reinforce previously existing notions as well as the public's current understanding of Islam (Brubaker, 2013). Categorization of Muslims as religious or non-religious, western or non-western, or even culturally or non-culturally Muslim runs the risk of reproducing existing narratives linked to Islamophobia in European Union society

In modern Western European society, Sinno asserts that a history of economic and educational disadvantages, discrimination, and the government's lack of investment into adequate integration measures has left some groups of Muslim migrants in a lower socioeconomic class that the media now associates as an attribute of Muslim culture and religious identity (2013). This assumption can be potentially harmful to Muslims in Western Europe as their religious or cultural identity is transformed into that of a disadvantaged group of outsiders, despite the fact that there are Muslim immigrants who are part of the middle or upper class. This fact is often overlooked by the news media as



narratives framing Muslims as a group that is different than the majority are more likely to emerge.

The association of religious and ethnic minorities with themes of welfare abuse and economic, educational, and societal disadvantage in the media or political discourse not only creates stigmas, but can compel Muslims to assert their own identities. Sinno holds that reactively asserting one's identity is a response to societal categorization and revalorizes what has been devalorized. In other words, individual identities are reasserted to in response to the dominant media discourse that claims that all Muslims are the same (2013). In addition to stigmatization, Sinno holds that self-identification as 'Muslim' is, more generally, a result of "the experience of being cast, categorized, countered, queried, and held accountable as Muslims in public discourse and private interaction" (2013). In short, the assertion or reassertion of Muslim identity is a response to societal and media discourse that holds a particular group accountable for acting or thinking in a specific way. The assertion of identity also stems from a sense of accountability for other Muslim individuals, whether it be confirming or denying claims exhibited in institutional or media discourse (Sinno, 2013).

Prior to the presence of narratives about Muslims in Western Europe, individuals who identified as 'Muslim' did not have to assert their identities or political or religious beliefs to Western European publics. Brubaker (2013) holds that the evolution of public representations of Muslims in Western European society has altered the mechanisms used by immigrants in identity formation and self-understanding. Furthermore, Brubaker asserts that the experience of being 'assigned' to a particular set of practices on the basis of religious identity has led those who identify as 'Muslim', but who are not particularly

religious or observant, to identify more strongly as being a 'secular', 'cultural', or 'religious' Muslim in European society (2013).

*The Power and Influence of the News Media*

Prior to explaining the results from the metanarrative analysis that will be deployed later in the analysis, a general overview of the media will be provided to better understand the impact that media discourse about Muslim immigrants can have on individual perceptions and the creation of narratives about Muslim immigrants in Italian society.

The media have the power to influence a given public in a variety of ways. Filho argues that discourse that is molded to appeal to the interests or opinions of readers has the potential to become more influential (as cited in Fernandes & Morte, 2011). A relationship is created between the media and the public via the media's election of certain subjects as breaking, front page news; the agenda is set when the media decides what to include for viewing by the greater public. Filho holds that effects on cognition, and, more specifically, social recognition and representation, result from the mere inclusion of subjects in the daily news (as cited in Fernandes & Morte, 2011).

Furthermore, the social reality in which an individual participates is unique to the discourses to which they are exposed. For instance, an individual who subscribes solely to far-right news media will be part of a different social reality than a person who is not exposed to these types of discourses. Wolf asserts that individuals do not interact with or directly experience all of the 'layers' of their social reality; rather, individuals live through the symbolic and linguistic elements of the media (as cited in Fernandes & Morte, 2011).

While this analysis does not focus on cognition or attitude change resulting from discourse about Muslim immigrants in Italian society, the effects of news media discourse

are worthy of mention. The media especially plays a role in the construction of racial hatred. For instance, in 2005, headlines in major Portuguese newspapers announced that there was a 'rampage' that occurred at one of Lisbon's largest beaches (Fernandes & Morte, 2011). According to the media, the 'rampage', or robberies and civil unrest, that took place involved as many as 500 hundred black youth. Police reports later revealed that only three black youth were involved and detained but not charged, and three civilians and two police officers sought medical treatment for minor injuries (Fernandes & Morte, 2011). Media reports of the incident, which initially relied on the testimonial of one bartender whose credibility was not established, inflated the issue to an insolated event of massive proportions. In this situation, the media succeeding in racializing an event that had little to do with race or ethnicity. Discussion about Lisbon's 'problematic neighborhoods' as breeding grounds for crime circulated and produced narratives that associated ethnic minorities with gangs, insecurity, and terror (Fernandes & Morte, 2011). The media ultimately reinforced hostile discourses about immigrants and the feeling of unease that creates religious and racial tensions. While not in Italy, this is a recent example that demonstrates how events at the level of civil society in Western Europe produce discourses that reflect existing tensions about religious and ethnic minorities.

#### *Discourse about Muslim Immigrants and Politicization in Italy*

Discourse about Muslim migrants in Italian society can take a variety of forms and originate from different sources. Discourse about Muslims in the media, however, can be some of the most hostile forms.

Discourse about Muslim immigrants can take hostile forms via the local press. When faced with an economic or cultural 'threat' unique to a particular locale, the local news

media has a tendency to create a threatening representation of the illegal immigrant (Riccio, 1999). Without considering the migratory phenomenon in its broader context, complex problems concerning migration are reduced to issues of cross-cultural confrontation (Riccio, 1999). The confusion of the local press or citizens demonizes migrants; problems, such as change occurring in familiar places or anxiety produced from the presence of different cultures, are vented upon migrants in the news media (Riccio, 1999). When immigrants are portrayed as a danger from multiple points of view, an inaccurate social reality is embedded in dominant discourse. When research dispels popular assumptions about migrants, it rarely appears in the news media or may not solve the problem (Riccio, 1999).

Discourse about Muslim immigrants that exhibits racism or hostility can have negative implications for both religious or ethnic minorities and non-minorities alike. First, discourse about religious and ethnic minorities can reproduce previously existing notions about migrants that are held by Italian society (Fernandes and Morte, 2011). For instance, the frequent juxtaposition of migrants with stories of crime and disorder in the news media can reinforce the notion that all migrants are criminals. Discourse that exhibits hostility towards Muslim immigrants or juxtaposes immigrants with stories about crime and public order can change external perceptions and self-identification (Brubaker, 2013). For instance, public representations in the news media or political discourse can affect how immigrants understand their role in society as well as how they understand other ethnic groups to perceive them. The portrayal of Muslim immigrants as practitioners of an extreme form of Islam can cause Muslim immigrants who are not particularly religious to identify as being 'culturally Muslim' when, previously, there was little reason to ponder

their identity (Brubaker, 2013). Furthermore, negative representations of Muslim immigrants can hold them accountable for being Muslim in public or private interaction (Brubaker, 2013). Muslims are held accountable by Muslims and non-Muslims for possessing an identity defined by other Muslims and society alike. As a result, 'Muslim' as an identity category is increasingly embraced rather than an identity that is taken for granted (Brubaker, 2013).

Additionally, discourses about Muslim immigrants can influence the identities asserted by grandchildren and children of migrants. The grandchildren and children of Muslim immigrants experience difficulty in forming a "taken-for-granted" Muslim identity, which is due, in part, to the lack of a cultural or institutional setting that would make this habitual identification more possible (Brubaker, 2013). It would be less problematic for the grandchildren or children of migrants, for instance, to cultivate or maintain a Muslim identity in their country of origin (Brubaker, 2013). Families of Muslim grandchildren and children cannot necessarily facilitate a 'more Muslim' identity. Brubaker holds that migrant families are in chronic struggle over the definition of Islam and being a "good Muslim" in a non-Muslim country, and there are no additional supports to produce this taken-for-granted Muslim identity outside of the family structure (2013). Instead, the grandchildren and children are subject to a plethora of explicit discourse about Islam and Muslim identity which are produced by Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Brubaker, 2013). Grandchildren and children are socialized in a society where Islam and the identities of Muslim immigrants are continuously discussed and debated in the public sphere.

In addition to changes in the way that Muslim immigrants experience the process of self-identification, media discourse about Muslim immigrants can create implicit

associations between Muslim migrants and emotionally salient topics (Sinno, 2013).

According to Mamdani, discourse about religious or ethnic minorities has turned religion into a political category and politicized cultural practice (2000). Mamdani holds that using culture to explain societal events or outcomes tends to avoid the historical context in which migrants are situated (2000). For instance, discourse about the 'sudden presence' of Islam in the Italian public sphere ignores the historical context of migratory flows. Rather than considering that Muslim immigrants have been living in Italy and using prayer rooms for almost half of a century, it is assumed that Islam in Italy is a more recent and problematic phenomenon. Media discourse about the recent visibility of Islam that is juxtaposed with emotionally salient issues featuring Muslim protagonists, such as crime or disruptions in public order, can create an association between Islam and unrelated societal concerns.

Furthermore, discourse about Muslim immigrants has created a "Muslim question" through associations to issues of security and public order (Kuru, 2008). Using France as a case study, Kuru deems it problematic when concerns, such as the race riots of 2005, occurring in the *banlieues* of Paris are connected with Islam when they are based on a variety of other socioeconomic problems (2008). Through this example, it is evident that the linkage of societal concerns with religious identity can be problematic for individuals who practice Islam. Not only do Muslim migrants become a threat to public security, but they become seen as individuals who are unwilling to integrate (Kuru, 2008). The "Muslim question" is also linked to the perceived violence with which Islam is associated. According to Mamdani, the link between Islam and terrorism that was reinforced in the media after the events of September 11 transformed religion into a political category that places Muslim individuals into either the 'good Muslim' or 'bad Muslim' category instead of

differentiating terrorists from civilians (2002). The links between Islam and violence present in the media as well as the transformation of Islam into a political category reduces the problem of terrorism to a specific group of individuals.

This idea that Muslims fall into either the 'good Muslim' or 'bad Muslim' category is reflected in the Italian news media in various contexts. For instance, Lega Nord member and Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Francesco Speroni proposed an amendment that would bar Muslims from entering European Union countries (Cere, 2002). Although this amendment was not looked upon favorably and was not passed, excerpts from Speroni's speech circulated in the news media and at the institutional level of governance. When discussing his proposed legislation, Speroni concludes by proclaiming that Muslims who currently reside in Italy who are "good and well behaved" are welcome to stay (Cere, 2002). The notion that there are either 'good Muslims' or 'bad Muslims' who are violent is reflected in the discourse surrounding the policy proposal. Not only does Speroni reinforce the notion that Muslims must fit into one of two categories, but he contributes to the perpetuation of post-September 11 media discourse that groups of 'bad Muslims' reside among other 'Westerners'.

#### *Islamophobia in the Media: Shared Frames and Discourses*

Islam has increasingly evolved into an internal affair in several western European countries (Kuru, 2008). Due to colonial and post-colonial relationships and the geographic proximity to predominantly Muslim countries, Europe has attracted a greater number of Muslim immigrants and asylum seekers than the United States (Sinno, 2013). Conservative groups, populist political parties, and media sources are among the groups that have created or perpetuated hostile narratives about Muslim individuals on a global scale.

Narratives that link Muslims to terrorism or abuse of national systems, however, are more concentrated in Europe (Sinno, 2013).

In modern European society, Sinno observes s evolving discourses about Islam in the media. Hostility towards Muslims is now exhibited by the center right or other non extremist groups. Although hostile narratives are found principally in far-right or populist tabloids, mainstream politicians and activists have increasingly adopted these narratives, whether intentionally or inadvertently, to describe societal or social problems (Sinno, 2013). Islamophobia is no longer an attribute of solely far-right discourse; when tensions reach a high, center-right politicians or public figures on either end of the political spectrum can adopt hostile discourse towards religious or ethnic minorities. For instance, Nicolas Sarkozy, politician and former center-right president of France, was known for hostile remarks about the Roma populations in France. While not considered as 'extreme' as his far-right running mate Marine Le Pen, his remarks demonstrate how hostility toward non-French citizens can manifest itself in discourse and emanate from any place on the political spectrum.

Aside from adopting hostile discourse for the purpose of expressing political views, discourse is adopted to build political coalitions or to garner votes during election time. According to Sinno, negative coverage of minorities is at a high during election and pre-election periods (2013). Specific frames in the news media, such as the "attack of the left" frame, shapes discourse to discredit leftist policies and associate Muslims with abuse of welfare policies that were created by the left (Sinno, 2013). This frame is also used to proclaim that leftist social welfare policies attract large numbers of Muslims who could be potentially 'dangerous' to society (Sinno, 2013). These frames can be harmful as they



juxtapose Muslim individuals with issues of welfare abuse and crime, especially when hostile discourse is adopted by non-extremist groups who want to increase their popularity prior to an election.

Islamophobia can also manifest itself in the media via the nature of media conglomerates themselves. The presence of corporate or media ties creates the opportunity for 'frame sharing', where stories spread from one newspaper to the next (Sinno, 2013). Discourse can be created or consolidated when sharing information across mediums owned by the same parent company. For instance, news outlets owned by Robert Murdoch's News Corporation have published articles borrowed from fellow media outlets that are part of the corporation (Sinno, 2013). According to a content analysis conducted by Sinno, articles published by media outlets that are part of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation tended to use terrorism or other frames that exhibited hostility towards Muslims as a group (2013). If articles concerning religious or ethnic minorities are shared between both international and national media outlets, the subject matter, whether it is positive or racist, becomes a more visible discourse.

In addition to the sharing of stories within the corporate media structure in other European countries, discourse about religious or ethnic minorities is also shared within Italian news corporations. For example, *Corriere della Sera*, one of the oldest and most reputable Italian newspapers, and Rizzoli, an Italian publishing house, are owned by the same parent company. Discourse sharing, whether intentional or not, is evident in the case of Oriana Fallaci, an Italian author known for controversial statements and books about Islam and Muslims in Europe, and the promotion of her literature. Due to the relationship between Rizzoli, who published Fallaci's books, and *Corriere della Sera*, the Italian news

daily would contain publicity about Fallaci's books featuring anti-Islam narratives. *Corriere della Sera* would also publish articles written by Fallaci that contained anti-Islamic sentiments. Despite the newspaper's political orientation, this type of corporate relationship increased the potential for this type of discourse to emerge.

The characteristics of discourse about Muslims in the media go beyond the political orientation of the news source; the media corporation, its owners, and its partnerships play a role in discourse diffusion.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

To determine how discourse about Muslim immigrants that originates at the micro level of civil society becomes embedded in narratives at the macro, institutional level of politics, a metanarrative analysis will be employed. This type of narrative analysis will help to break down societal narratives about Muslim immigrants into different parts in order to more closely examine how discourse is taken from the level of civil society and becomes reflected in policy proposal narratives.

The idea of a meta narrative, or “a narrative about a narrative”, is to legitimate or explain society through a larger, master idea by placing abstract stories and ideas into a meaningful pattern (O’Brien, 2012). Aside from telling a “bigger story”, the aim of a metanarrative is to identify and analyze different levels of separate narratives for more meaningful interpretation.

Furthermore, a metanarrative analysis is a tool for comprehending inexplicable or refractory policy problems (O’Brien, 2012). In this study, the metanarrative analysis will be used as a theoretical tool for examining policy discourse that is linked to a dominant societal narrative. Comparing and contrasting competing narratives that make up a larger metanarrative will provide for the examination of the policy components surrounding the micro conflicts that influence the filter through which religious and ethnic minorities are perceived (O’Brien, 2012). According to Derrida (1967/1973), breaking down the policy discourse involves “disassembling the ground paradigm” for the purpose of exposing the source, paradox, or contradiction in society (as cited in O’Brien, 2012). After this deconstruction occurs, a new narrative can be put forth, providing a new way to think about the root of the discourse (O’Brien, 2012).

The narratives in this study will be broken down to reveal their structures and the discourse of which they are composed. The analysis will feature a breakdown of narratives about Muslim immigrants into their different structural components, such as the type of narrative, the story line, the ideographs, and the policy discourse that emerges (O'Brien, 2012).

Each narrative will be deconstructed into different sub-units, which can take a variety of forms. First, the 'dominant narrative' is a sub-unit that is informed by storylines in the news media and 'ideographs' in political discourse, which will be highlighted later in this section. An 'invasion narrative', for instance, would be informed by discourse that alludes to the notion of immigrants as 'invading' the public sphere.

Story lines are another unit that will be used in the metanarrative analysis. According to O'Brien, story lines are the discourse that constitutes the body of the narratives and "help to organize clusters of emerged meanings from the analysis" (2011). The story lines in this analysis will be the stories and ideas that emerge from media discourse and, more specifically, articles found in the Italian news media. In an article where the subject is the creation of a new local ordinance to address complaints about noise made in an Italian city center, for instance, the storyline that a group of people is making too much noise during the night or that these individuals are disrupting public order could emerge. While very general, storylines such as these are the basis from which discourse about Muslim immigrants will be created or perpetuated.

Next, the 'ideograph' is a unit of analysis in the narrative that is a "high-order abstraction" of a particular orientation (O'Brien, 2011). In other terms, the ideograph is an idea derived from a discourse or set of discourses that corresponds with a particular point

of view. The term 'ideograph' can be thought of as an 'idea in political discourse' to facilitate a better understanding of the place at which these 'ideas' or ideographs are located. Political discourse is a major source of ideographs that are embedded in the language and used in slogans (O'Brien, 2011). Furthermore, these ideas are "culture bound" and have the potential to guide individual behavior (O'Brien, 2011). The ideographs that will be the subject of study in this analysis are eventually transformed in to policy proposal narratives, signifying the shift of discourse about Muslim immigrants to the macro level. The political slogans and terminology used to describe the number of immigrants arriving to the Italian island of Lampedusa, for instance, are examples of ideographs. As a response to the 'overwhelming' number of arrivals, politicians deployed the term 'invasion' to quantify the number of new immigrants in Italy as well as the term 'swarms' to describe how Lampedusa was bearing the administrative 'burden'. These ideographs were especially powerful in perpetuating the notion that Lampedusa was being 'invaded' both in the news media and at the level of politics. Pictures of boats full of African migrants accompanied by the invasion tagline were front page news, and little context was provided for Italians who were not familiar with the circumstances behind the decade-long migratory phenomenon.

Finally, 'policy proposal narratives', the last unit of analysis, are defined as stories that "underwrite and stabilize assumptions for policy making" (O'Brien, 2011). In other words, a policy proposal narrative is a group of coherent, unified discourses that can serve as the basis for policy making. According to O'Brien, the goal of policy narratives is to convince their public to think or do something by describing a current situation in society (2011). While policy narratives can originate both from a community at the micro level of

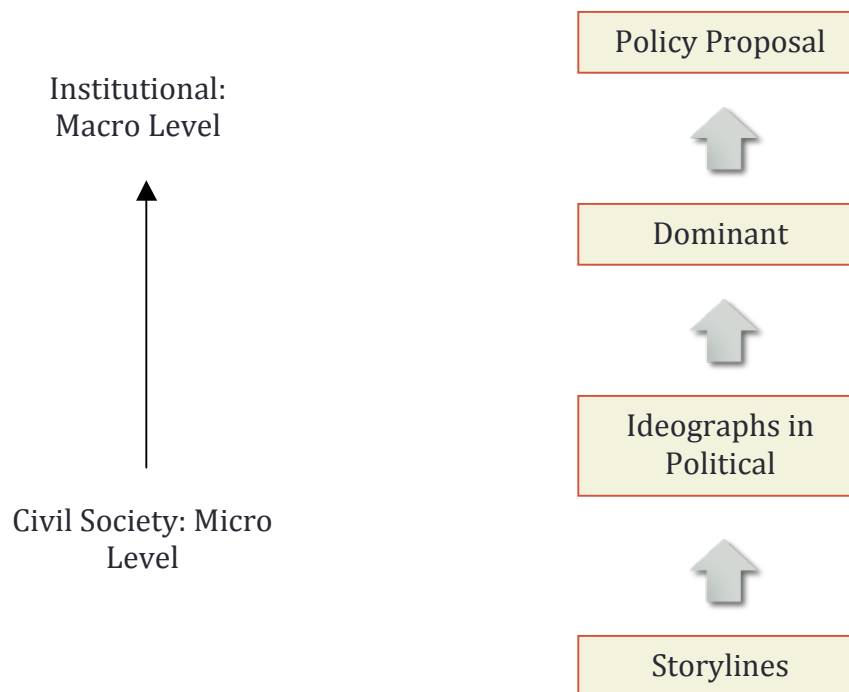
civil society and from politicians at the institutional level, this analysis will focus exclusively on narratives that originate from the micro level. In the presence of contradictory facts, figures, or notions, policy narratives are resistant to transformation or modification (O'Brien, 2011). Fueled by the ideographs embedded in political language, dominant policy narratives can facilitate the movement of a policy proposal through legislative channels (O'Brien, 2011).

Examining the sub-units of a narrative through use of a metanarrative analysis will allow for additional comprehension of the origins of political rhetoric. Breaking down the narratives will provide new possibilities for thinking about and viewing religious identity and immigration in Italian society.

To clearly demonstrate the path of discourse from the micro level to the level of policy narratives via the news media, a chart will be utilized to show the breakdown of the narratives into their respective sub-units and the discourse that corresponds. The format of the chart will also provide the opportunity to compare and contrast 'story lines', 'ideographs', and 'policy narratives' embedded in various discourses. The chart and the format in which the analysis is displayed will enable policy makers, analysts, or members of society to possess a more comprehensive view of the sources of policy narratives present in society.

An example of the chart that will be used to complete the metanarrative analysis is shown below to better comprehend the relationship between the dominant narrative and its sub-units:

*Figure 1: Metanarrative Analysis Framework*



To identify the relevant narrative elements of dominant discourse about Muslim immigrants, the data sources used to conduct the metanarrative analysis will come from the Italian news media, online news mediums, and videos posted publicly on the internet. Since the analysis is concerned with narratives present in Italian society, data will only be taken from the Italian news media written in the Italian language. Lexis Nexis Academic was used to gather articles included in the 30-item sample. After obtaining the articles, the original legislative documents, such as local ordinances, and Youtube videos of the Council of Lombardia proceedings that were referenced in the news articles were located for further analysis. Articles were obtained from Lexis Nexis using search terms relevant to the policy proposal narratives as well as themes discussed in scholarship. Due to the salient nature of the policy proposal narratives, the use of search terms related to the policy narratives was a way to locate media discourse that occurred prior to, and led up to, these

narratives. After retrieving the results of the key word search, articles containing relevant content were selected for analysis. Each article was coded for themes that inform the policy proposal narratives. Common themes that emerged inform the storylines and ideographs referenced in the analysis. The sample size was selected on the basis that the central storylines informing the narratives and discussed in previous scholarship were adequately covered without requiring a large, superfluous sample. Moreover, the objective of the analysis is not to quantify, rather, to examine discourse intended for public consumption about immigrants in Italian news media and politics.

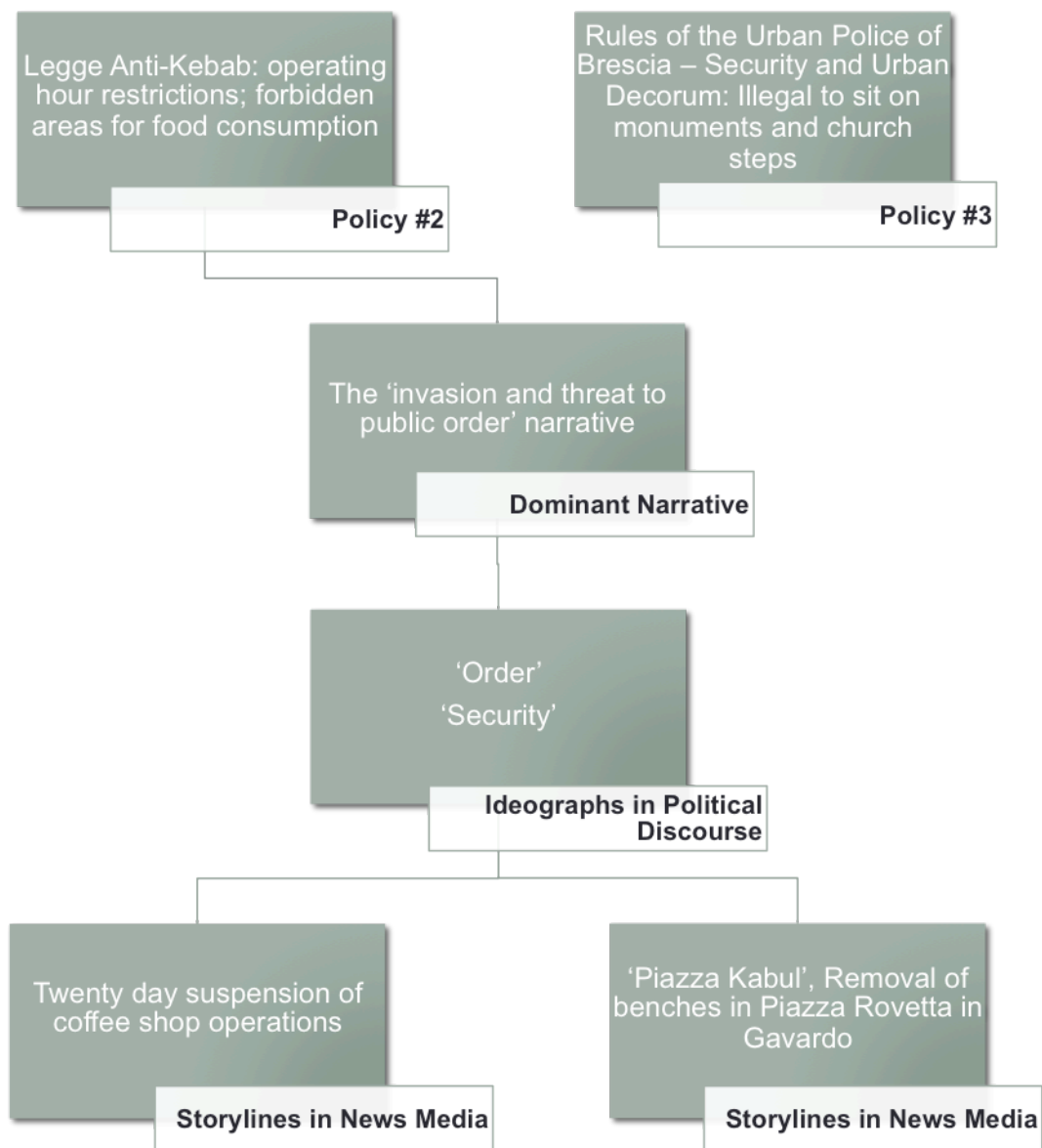
### *Data*

*Figure 2: Narrative 1- The ‘Their Religious and Cultural Differences are a Threat’ Narrative*





Figure 3: Narrative 2- The 'Invasion and Threat to Public Order' Narrative



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of the discussion section of this analysis is to deconstruct the narratives composed of discourse about Muslim immigrants in Italian society in order to analyze the different policies and policy proposals that are linked to the dominant narratives. The metanarrative analysis aims to demonstrate how discourse about Muslim immigrants originates at the level of civil society and is reflected in policy narratives at a macro level.

The data highlights two narratives that emerged from a content analysis of Italian news media as well as scholarship about discourse about Muslim immigrants in Italy. The discussion section of the analysis will provide further detail about the content of each of the dominant narratives and provide an example of the ideographs and policy or institutional narratives that make up the narrative.

Discourse about Muslim immigrants in Italy is driven by two narratives based on threats to culture and public order. These narratives will be referred to as the ‘their religious and cultural differences are a threat’ narrative, the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative, respectively. The metanarrative analysis will demonstrate how these dominant narratives drive policy or policy proposal narratives about religious and ethnic minorities, which are created through the adoption of storylines in the news media and the management of ideographs in political discourse.

### *The ‘Their Religious and Cultural Differences are a Threat’ Narrative*

The ‘their religious and cultural differences are a threat’ narrative is composed of storylines that highlight the cultural differences between Muslim immigrants and Italians and a perceived loss of tradition in historical city centers. It results in policy proposal

narrative that aims to regulate behavior and economic enterprise in one of Italy's city centers. Aside from the media, the proponents of the narratives are the local police, the director of the Confesercenti, and local mayors.

According to Sinno, hostile discourse about Muslim migrants links them to cultural rigidity and contact with Muslim forces outside of the country who want to take over and "Islamacize" the country (Sinno, 2013). The idea of Muslim migrants as a threat to Italian culture was reflected in the media discourse analyzed in the sample of news articles. The majority of the articles were written about towns located in northern or north central Italy by both the local or national media.

*Storyline #1: Loss of Local Plates and "La Torre"*

The dominant 'their religious and cultural differences are a threat' narrative is fueled by storylines about ethnic fast-food establishments and the presence of business selling non-EU products in Italian city centers. The storylines found in news media discourse that drives the 'their religious and cultural differences are a threat' narrative constitute a discourse that implies that the presence of businesses owned by Muslim migrants are a threat to the culture and tradition in the Italian city center. Articles in the Italian news media include personal accounts of individuals who witness an evolving city center. For instance, an article published in *Il Giorno*, an Italian news daily based in Milan, is titled, "The Spark: The name 'The Tower' given to the kebab-pizzeria on Corso Sempione is not liked". The article includes statements made by locals in Nerviano, Italy who feel that kebab shops in the city center contribute to a loss of Italian culture and tradition. The article features a quote from a local citizen, who proclaimed, "We are losing all of our traditions. There is no longer a restaurant in the center of Nerviano, let alone typical local

plates”.<sup>1</sup> The fear of a disappearance of local plates informs the story line that the presence of kebab shops could threaten the local food culture. In addition to this storyline, the article also reports that the Lega Nord, an Italian far-right populist political party, argues that citizens have been complaining that the name of the kebab establishment, ‘La Torre’ or ‘The Towers’, associates a historical symbol of Nerviano with a product that is not reflected in Italy’s history or traditions. This storyline reflects the belief that the towers would lose their historical significance if linked to the kebab establishment. Moreover, the use of the name The Towers for a place that historically does not belong in the Italian public sphere causes uneasiness as two cultures that are portrayed as incompatible are meshing before the eyes of local citizens.

#### *‘Ideographs’ in Political Discourse*

The ‘their religious and cultural differences are a threat’ narrative that is founded on the storylines that local plates are disappearing and discontent over “La Torre” is represented by the ‘tradition’, ‘privilege’, and ‘value’ ideographs in political discourse. Following media discourse about the kebab shop on Corso Sempione, Lega Nord spokesperson Massimo Cozzi responded, “There is not a desire to exclude at all, only to give priority, at least in the historic city center, to those who are associated with activities that privilege our land and traditions”.<sup>2</sup> This political rhetoric, which is populated with the ‘privilege’ and ‘tradition’ ideographs, reinforces the notion that the traditions of Muslim migrants are too different from those of Italians. Additionally, it devalues their economic

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<sup>1</sup> Bellegotti, G. (2009, August 22). La Scintilla; Non è piaciuto il nome “La Torre” data alla pizzeria-kebab di corso Sempione. *Il Giorno*, pp. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Bellegotti, G. (2009, August 22). La Scintilla; Non è piaciuto il nome “La Torre” data alla pizzeria-kebab di corso Sempione. *Il Giorno*, pp. 2.

endeavors in that their business is not 'Italian enough' to have the privilege of having a restaurant in an Italian city center.

Approximately five months later, an additional political actor became involved; this time, from the Confesercenti, a national organization that represents about 353,000 business in Italy. In response to the storylines in media discourse, Alessandro Cerri, director of the Confesercenti, addressed the concerns about stores or restaurants that sell non-EU products, stating that "The Confesercenti holds that in areas of great commercial value... the installment of kebab establishments...that, because of its characteristics does not guarantee determined quality standards, will be prohibited"<sup>3</sup>. Through management of the 'value' ideograph present in Confesercenti discourse, Cerri implies that kebab shops do not hold the commercial 'value' desired by local officials to maintain the cultural traditions of the city center. To compensate for this statement, Cerri further proclaimed that an initiative already exists "in which the criteria of protection of areas of particular value, sociocultural interest, and commercial-tourism are defined".<sup>4</sup> In other words, Cerri attempts to assert that resentment is not geared towards kebab shops; rather, the city and its inhabitants are following protocol that has been in place. In this statement, Cerri supports Cozzi's assertion that businesses owned by immigrants have no place in a historical city center. Through the manipulation of the 'value' and 'protection' ideographs, the Confesercenti further reinforces the notion that Italian city centers are areas of particular worth that warrant protection from Kebab shops, which do not have cultural or commercial value or align with the characteristics of the territory. The use of the term 'protection' in political discourse signifies the presence of a group of outsiders who is

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<sup>3</sup> Unknown. (2010, January 23). Anche la Confesercenti boccia il kebab in via Battisti. *La Nazione*, pp. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Unknown. (2010, January 23). Anche la Confesercenti boccia il kebab in via Battisti. *La Nazione*, pp. 9.

exerting influence in the public sphere. The ‘protection’ ideograph is based on the perception of the ‘Islamicization’ of the city center, portrayed in a way that pits the religious and cultural values and traditions of Muslim immigrants against the traditions established by native Italians- as if their culture, in the form of kebab shops, would overrun Italian customs.

According to their website, the mission of the Confesercenti is to:

“represent the world of small and medium-sized business that, with their dynamism, ensure economic growth and employment in Italy and Europe. The Confesercenti aims to contribute to the growth of businesses and the economy and the development of democracy through collaboration with institutions and social, economic, cultural, and humanitarian organizations” (*Confesercenti – Chi siamo*, n.d.).

While the association boasts collaboration with cultural institutions, the rhetoric of Alessandro Cerri reflects the opposite. Unease towards businesses that do not align with the cultural characteristics of the territory is exhibited. Although Lega Nord is identified as a far-right political party, the Confesercenti is composed of several parties and represents the interests of individuals living in Italy rather than one political ideology. Although its mission statement proclaims that it stands by the interests of growth and employment in Italy and Europe, the ideographs embedded in its political discourse indicate that only European business exercises are of ‘value’ and worthy of protection, despite the fact that some Muslim immigrants identify as Italian or European. The ‘protection’ ideograph used by Alessandro Cerri evokes images of a group that is different from the religious ideals of the Italian people and portrays them as a group that will not be able to assimilate into society.

After discussing the need for the protection of areas of particular value, Cerrai shifts the focus of his discourse to the religion practiced by immigrants who own kebab shops in the city center, stating, “We are avoiding unnecessary religious wars regarding the “Yes Kebab, No Kebab” issue”.<sup>5</sup> Following Cerrai’s claims that the protection of areas of value is not a new concept, the director of the Confesercenti acknowledges religious difference while simultaneously defending that the proposed law has nothing to do with religion. He aims to shift the focus back to the fact that initiatives for the protection and maintenance of cultural and historical traditions in city centers in Lombardia existed prior to confusion over the existence of different cultures and religions in the public sphere. By framing the issue as an avoidance of an “unnecessary religious war”, Cerrai makes a generalization that all immigrants who work in kebab shops from predominantly Muslim countries are religious Muslims, making the unspoken more explicit. The conflict between the region and the proprietors of enterprises selling non-EU products stemmed from the issue of the presence of foreign cultures and traditions; Cerrai, however, brought religious tensions to the surface. The mention of existing religious tensions in political discourse pits the Italian people who practice Catholicism against the migrants who practice Islam.

While the language about Muslim immigrants comes from politicians, government institutions, or local citizens in the media, not all of the Italians or EU nationals are against the installment of kebab shops in Italy’s historical city centers. Stefano, an Italian citizen living in Nerviano, did not reference ‘tradition’ or ‘protection’ when probed by the news media. In a statement following concerns voiced by Lega, Stefano states, “I like kebabs and go to eat one almost every week. I do not have anything against foreign citizens who want

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<sup>5</sup> Unknown. (2010, January 23). Anche la Confesercenti bocchia il kebab in via Battisti. *La Nazione*, pp.

to work in an honest manner. I understand the argument for those who are irregular migrants...”<sup>6</sup> Stefano’s argument does not adopt the ‘value’ and ‘protection’ ideas in this particular discourse, but, nonetheless, cultural tensions were still evident in the policy proposal narratives at the macro level. The example of Stefano demonstrates that discourse that counters the language of politicians is present; it is not, however, reflected in policy proposal narratives at the macro level.

*Political and Institutional Discourse – Policy Proposal Narratives*

The ‘their cultural and religious differences are a threat’ narrative is driven by storylines characterized by concerns about a loss of tradition due to the presence of businesses selling non-EU products, which, at the same time are imbued with meaning created by the ‘tradition’, ‘protection’, and ‘value’ ideographs present in political discourse. This results in a policy narrative that proposes restrictions on the opening of businesses that sell primarily non-EU products in the city center. Images warranting that ‘protection’ from the presence of foreign products is required or that ‘value’ is lost when these products are present create policy proposal narratives aimed at preventing the city from forfeiting their culture and traditions to the influence of the businesses owned by immigrants. .

Although micro cultural conflicts occurring over the presence of businesses that sell non-EU products occurred at the local level and in separate towns, arguments in this dominant societal narrative paved the way for the Progetto di Legge Harlem, or Harlem Law Project in the greater Lombardia region. Spearheaded by Massimiliano Orsatti, President of the 7<sup>th</sup> Council Committee of the Lombardia Region and member of the Lega Nord, the Legge Harlem is a legislative proposal that aims to govern the development and

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<sup>6</sup> Bellegotti, G. (2009, August 22). La Scintilla; Non è piaciuto il nome “La Torre” data alla pizzeria-kebab di corso Sempione. *Il Giorno*, pp. 2.



maintenance of commercial activity in the Lombardia Region. Lombardia is an administrative region in northern Italy. With approximately 10 million inhabitants in different 12 provinces, it is also the most populous region in Italy. According to the initial version of the law proposed in 2011, local officials in Lombardia will be vested with the authority to launch new commercial activities in the historical center or in areas that warrant redevelopment. Local officials, however, can limit the opening of businesses that do not align with the mission of protecting the artistic, historical, or environmental values of the city.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, individuals who open a business must know Italian or take a course to learn the language, and all signs and labels must also be translated to Italian. While the proposed legislation technically applies to business owned by Italian individuals, critics argue that the law would have more implications for non-EU nationals.

The storylines and ideographs that fuel the ‘their religious and cultural differences are a threat’ narrative are evidenced in the policy proposal narrative put forth by Massimiliano Orsatti in front of the Council of Lombardia. After stating the objectives of the legislation, Orsatti proclaims, “From tomorrow, we could say that Lombardia will truly return to being proprietors of its own territory”<sup>8</sup>. In this case, the policy narrative reflects a fear that the Italian people are no longer the cultivators of their own culture within the city center; rather, Muslim immigrants contribute to shifting traditions. In a separate interview about the Legge Harlem, Orsatti proclaimed that the Legge Harlem was important because “it gives our mayors the power to limit the opening of foreign shops on our territory”<sup>9</sup>. In

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<sup>7</sup> Unknown. (2012, February 16). Approvata la “legge Harlem”, sulla ristorazione etnica. *Varese News*.

<sup>8</sup> Max Orsatti. (2012, April 13). “Legge Harlem” PDL 85 – Massimiliano Orsatti. Retrieved March 1, 2013, from youtube.com.

<sup>9</sup> Lega Regionale Lombardia. (2012, August 28). Massimiliano Orsatti Consigliere Regionale Lega Nord. Retrieved March 1, 2013, from youtube.com.

this statement, Orsatti reinforces the notion of Lombardia managing its ‘own territory’, which reflects the ‘protection’ ideograph adapted in political discourse. The statement implies that Lombardia has to defend an area that they feel rightly belongs to them and that an outside group poses a threat.

Although the policy narrative is introduced by the Lega’s Orsatti, a group that has comparatively less members than center-right or center-left groups in Italy, a wide audience is still exposed to the policy proposal narrative. Orsatti presented the Legge Harlem in front of the 7<sup>th</sup> Council Committee of the Lombardia Region, which is composed of different parties on all ends of the political spectrum. Although the Council president is also a member of the Lega Nord, the Partito Democratico (PD), or Democratic Party, and Il Popolo della Liberta (PdL), or the People of Freedom, also serve as councilors. Whether or not the other parties agree, these types of policy proposal narratives still receive attention and are subject to voting and revision when discussed at the level of politics.

According to *Transatlantic Trends*, a survey conducted by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the percentage of Italians polled who felt that immigration was more of a problem than an opportunity spiked to 49% in 2009, then decreased again in 2010<sup>10</sup>. Although the spike could be attributed to other concerns, such as the continued arrival of immigrants from North Africa to the Island of Lampedusa, the spike corresponds with the time period in which discourse about the presence of kebab shops owned by Muslim migrants saturated the news media. According to the survey, “cultural values” were also the third most important criterion for citizenship acquisition in Italy, following “respect

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<sup>10</sup> German Marshall Fund of the United States, (2011). *Transatlantic trends: Immigration survey*. Retrieved from <http://trends.gmfus.org>.

institutions and laws” and “language ability”<sup>11</sup>. This demonstrates that while cultural values are not the most important criterion for citizenship according to Italian citizens, they rank among the top three concerns. Lastly, following the 2009 media discourse about the Kebab shops and the presence of ideographs in political discourse, only 37% of Italians polled in the 2010 *Transatlantic Trends* survey felt that Muslim immigrants were well integrated into Italian society, compared to the 41% of Italians who felt that Muslims were well integrated in 2011<sup>1213</sup>. This further supports the notion that opinions of Muslim immigrants were comparably worse when storylines about Muslims in relation to cultural threats were brought to the surface.

While less than half of the Italian individuals polled felt that immigration or Muslims were problematic in the survey items described above, the polls demonstrate that concerns about Islam in Italian society are still relevant and depend on the year in which the poll is conducted. This could be related to the discourses to which the public was exposed or the cross-cultural conflicts that were more salient in the media in a particular year.

#### *The ‘Invasion and Threat to Public Order’ Narrative*

The ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative is composed of storylines that link immigrants to disruptions caused in the city center and an invasion of public space. The dominant societal narrative results in a policy proposal narrative that aims to regulate behavior and the operating hours of businesses in the city center as well as the spaces used by Muslim immigrants while simultaneously excluding them from the space by law. The

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<sup>11</sup> German Marshall Fund of the United States, (2011). *Transatlantic trends: Immigration survey*. Retrieved from <http://trends.gmfus.org>.

<sup>12</sup> German Marshall Fund of the United States, (2011). *Transatlantic trends: Immigration survey*. Retrieved from <http://trends.gmfus.org>.

<sup>13</sup> German Marshall Fund of the United States, (2010). *Transatlantic trends: Immigration survey*. Retrieved from <http://trends.gmfus.org>.

proponents of the narratives are locals in the news media, the Questore, local officials, and politicians.

Similar to the ‘their religious and cultural differences are a threat’ narrative, the majority of the articles were written about towns located in northern or north central Italy by both the local or national media.

*Storyline #1: Suspension of Business Operations, ‘Piazza Kabul’, and Bench Removal*

The dominant ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative is fueled by storylines about suspensions of businesses frequented by immigrants, the nickname ‘Piazza Kabul’, and the removal of benches in a large piazza, or town square.

Storylines in news media discourse that inform the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative constitute a discourse that implies that Muslim immigrants who socialize in public spaces or outside of businesses owned by other Muslim migrants disrupt the order of the city center. The news media features stories highlighting instances of crime or illegality that occur outside of kebab shops, stores that perform money transfers, and coffee shops that tend to be frequented by minorities. For instance, in Padova, an article published in *Corriere della Sera*, one of Italy’s most reputable news dailies, is titled, “Bar closed for reasons of public order; Frequented by too many illegal immigrants”. The article reports that the coffee shop was closed by local police for a period of 20 days due to the presence of too illegal immigrants who did not possess a Permesso di Soggiorno, or Italian residence permit. The headline, “Bar closed for reasons of public order; Frequented by too many illegal immigrants” is the first thing seen by readers of the article<sup>14</sup>. Without having to read, the audience is already aware that immigrants cause disruptions and created a problem.

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<sup>14</sup> Unknown. (2009, August 15). Bar chiuso per motivi di ordine pubblico; “Frequentato da troppi clandestini”. *Corriere della Sera*, pp. 5.

The use of the words ‘public order’ and ‘immigrants’ in the headline of the article associates all immigrants who socialize in the city center as well as the businesses they socialize in front of with places that breed crime and disorder. In addition to the headline of the article, the storyline is also shaped by a description of a sign that was written by the business owner whose operations were temporarily suspended. The sign, which hung on the door following the suspension, read, “For reasons of public order in this establishment, entrance is prohibited to people in possession of drugs or without their permit of stay”.<sup>15</sup> This discourse further reinforces the link between Muslim immigrants, who the media portrayed as the reason for the suspension, and concerns about public order. While Italian individuals can be implicated by the drug prohibition, immigrants are the only individuals who could potentially not possess a residence permit. This type of targeted discourse links immigrants to drugs and illegality. Without a way to determine who is in possession of a residence permit, all immigrants who frequent the establishment will be under the watch of the public.

An additional storyline evidenced in news media discourse that informs the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative constitutes a discourse that implies that the public sphere is being taken over by Muslim immigrants. Articles in the Italian media feature discourse that points to the sudden ‘presence’ of these individuals in urban spaces. For instance, in Gavardo, an article published in *Corriere della Sera* discusses the removal of benches in a piazza deemed “historically significant” by local authorities. The act was committed to discourage individuals from gathering in the piazza late into the night. While the local administration did not explicitly state that they were targeting immigrants, they

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<sup>15</sup> Unknown. (2009, August 15). Bar chiuso per motivi di ordine pubblico; “Frequentato da troppi clandestini”. *Corriere della Sera*, pp. 5.

are portrayed as the only individuals who utilize the space late at night. Local residents also recognize that immigrants are the group in question. In response to the removal of the benches, a local citizen interviewed by the journalist states, “We arrived at this point because of the foreigners. But taking away the benches... what does that solve?”.<sup>16</sup> The article’s emphasis of the piazza’s historical significance coupled with media discourse about the overwhelming number of migrants who socialize there produces a fear that Muslim immigrants are ‘invading’ a place that influences the social fabric of the city center. In response to the removal of benches in the piazza, local immigrants responded, “We [wear] the veil, but we are Italian” or “Citizenship is not a question of a card” in reference to the residence permit document.<sup>17</sup> While the mayor did not explicitly state that religion influenced his decision to remove the benches, discourse in the media brings religious tensions to the surface. In addition to this storyline, the article reminds readers of ‘Piazza Kabul’, the nickname given to the piazza in question, to characterize the nationality of the individuals who allegedly occupy the space. The fact that the piazza was nicknamed Piazza Kabul after the city of a predominantly Muslim country is associated with the perception that Muslim immigrants are the principle occupants of this public space. The name Piazza Kabul reflects the storyline that the area is overrun by immigrants who transformed the appearance of the piazza from an Italian space to that of a predominantly Muslim country. The individuals who frequent Piazza Kabul in the storyline are portrayed as noisy

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<sup>16</sup> Spatola, G. (2011, January 11). Immigrati e spaccio: via le panchine; Gli anziani protestano. *Corriere della Sera*, pp. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Unknown. (2008, January 7). Brescia, Piazza Rovetta- Largo Formentone. *Brescia Oggi*.

individuals who chat “from morning until night”<sup>18</sup> This links Muslim immigrants in Gavardo to disturbances that occur in or near the piazza, despite their actual involvement.

*'Ideographs' in Political Discourse*

The ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative is founded on the storyline that immigrants who socialize or frequent particular spaces in the city center commit crimes, make noise, and take over the public space. These storylines are represented by the ‘order’ and ‘security’ ideographs in political discourse. In response to concerns about illegal immigrants or groups that ‘gather’ outside of business owned by immigrants, the Questore, or chief of police operations, in Padova stated that these establishments are problematic because “they are a threat to public order” and “they are frequented by too many illegal immigrants”.<sup>19</sup> The ‘order’ ideograph embedded in political discourse suggests that immigrants and the size of immigrant groups are the sole reasons for civil unrest. Furthermore, the assumption that immigrants who frequent the businesses in question are all illegal transforms them to a criminal status. Since there is no way to tell if an immigrant illegally resides the country in public interactions, aside from seeing their residence permit, this assumption puts all immigrants in the city center under suspicion. Without this knowledge, businesses owned by Muslim immigrants are viewed as magnets for other immigrants who can pose a threat to public order at any given time. Due to the characteristics of the Questore who produced this political discourse, the ‘security’ ideograph becomes embedded in the language. The Questore, or public security authority, are responsible for ensuring the safety of the city and its inhabitants. The ‘security’

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<sup>18</sup> Unknown. (2008, January 7). Brescia, Piazza Rovetta- Largo Formentone. *Brescia Oggi*.

<sup>19</sup> Unknown. (2009, August 15). Bar chiuso per motivi di ordine pubblico; “Frequentato da troppi clandestini”. *Corriere della Sera*, pp. 5.

ideograph is invoked when individuals who are responsible for ensuring public security deem immigrants a threat to public order. Through the generalization that all immigrants are illegal, the presence of immigrants in the city center is portrayed as a problem that warrants additional security measures to maintain order and safety. As subjects of the Questore's discourse, all immigrants, despite their individual circumstances, become targets of policing efforts.

The 'invasion and threat to public order' narrative that is founded on the 'Piazza Kabul' and bench removal storylines is also driven by the 'order' and 'security' ideographs present in political discourse. Following media discourse that created images of an invasion of the historical piazza in a city center, the Mayor of Gavardo commented on the situation in the city center, attesting, "There was a problem of public security...the streets have turned in to the living room of a house".<sup>20</sup> This political rhetoric, which is imbued with the 'security' ideograph, suggests that a large number of immigrants have settled comfortably in the city center and, as a result, a threat to public order is initiated. By evoking a description of streets that represent the personal space of a home and a room that is typically used for congregating purposes, an image of an area that is populated by immigrants who have settled in implies that these individuals are numerous and are here to stay.

#### *Political and Institutional Discourse – Policy Proposal Narratives*

The 'invasion and threat to public order' narrative is driven by storylines that portray immigrants who socialize near businesses owned by other immigrants or in public spaces as threats to the order of the city center. At the same time, these storylines are

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<sup>20</sup> Spatola, G. (2011, January 11). Immigrati e spaccio: via le panchine; Gli anziani protestano. *Corriere della Sera*, pp. 11.



imbued with meaning created by the 'order' and 'security' ideographs present in political discourse. As a result, two policy narratives emerge that limit the operating hours and food consumption areas of restaurants as well as spaces that individuals can occupy. First, images in the media that evoke a concern for public order link Muslim immigrants with disorder that occurs in the city center and generates policy proposals aimed to regulate the operating rules of businesses that sell kebabs or other ethnic fast-food. The arguments in this dominant narrative provided the context for the proposal of what was nicknamed the Legge Anti-Kebab, or Anti-Kebab Law, in the Lombardia region. Like the Legge Harlem, the proposed legislation was instigated by members of the Lega Nord and presented in the Regional Council of Lombardia. Due to the presence of political actors outside of the Lega Nord, the policy proposal narrative has a wider audience than the party itself. The Legge Anti-Kebab is included in a policy proposal narrative that seeks to regulate the opening and closing hours for fast-food or carry-out establishments and to stop the consummation of take-away food products outside of the confines of the establishment. Like the Legge Harlem, the Legge Anti-Kebab applies to businesses within the Lombardia region and was proposed and debated within its Regional Council. According to the proposed legislation, customers would be prohibited from consuming take-away cuisine in the external space of the restaurant. Businesses would be forbidden from installing gazebos, chairs, tables, or benches outside of their establishments for use by their patrons. Customers who purchase a slice of pizza, for instance, would not be permitted to consume their pizza using tables that are set up on the sidewalk. Additionally, rigid impositions on the hours of operation would take effect. Establishments that normally operate from the early morning to late night hours would be forced to close their doors by midnight.

The storylines and ideographs that fuel the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative are evidenced in the policy proposal narrative put forth by the Lega Nord in front of the Regional Council of Lombardia. When discussing the objectives of the legislation, Lega Nord representative Davide Boni proclaims that the regulation “will be an additional instrument for security”.<sup>21</sup> Boni’s language, especially his use of the term ‘security’ suggests that businesses owned by immigrants attract individuals who would disrupt public order by committing illegal acts. The law applies to all businesses in the city center. A closer look, however, reveals that the policy proposal narrative is geared heavily towards kebab and take-out pizza stores which, in Padova, tended to be owned by immigrants and were sites for ‘disruptions’ that occurred in the storyline. In discourse following the proposed legislation, Daniele Belotti, a Councilor affiliated with Lega Nord, states that “Until the law, kebab shops did not have hours”<sup>22</sup>. By utilizing language that specifically identifies the targeted group, Belotti acknowledges that Muslim immigrants are one of the threats that the ordinance aims to subdue. On the surface, the ordinance appears to strive for a higher quality city center that aims to reduce the amount noise for the benefit of its residents. An examination of the reality surrounding the ordinance, however, reveals that kebab shops and take-away pizza businesses are some of the only places that are open after midnight. The imposition of operating restrictions on these food service establishments is a way to rid the city center of immigrants who socialize outside and pose the ‘security’ threat explained in storylines in the media. A restoration of order, in the form of the Legge Anti-Kebab, is viewed as achievable by suppressing the ‘threats’ posed by Muslim immigrants.

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<sup>21</sup> D’Amico, P. (2009, April 22). La Lombardia e la legge anti-kebab. *Corriere della Sera*.

<sup>22</sup> D’Amico, P. (2009, April 22). La Lombardia e la legge anti-kebab. *Corriere della Sera*.

Furthermore, the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative is driven by storylines that feature descriptions of immigrants who occupy a particular space. The storylines are embedded with meaning created by the ‘order’ ideograph present in political discourse. A resulting policy proposal narrative emerges that would forbid individuals from occupying specific public spaces.

The arguments put forth in the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ dominant narrative provided the context for a multi-local ordinance that would prohibit individuals from sitting on monuments, church steps, or fountains in the Brescia province. The ordinance, which is part of the Security and Quality of the Urban Environment section of the Rules of the Urban Police in the province of Brescia, states, among other regulations, that it is forbidden to sit or set up a temporary encampment near historical monuments.<sup>2324</sup> In contrast to the Legge Harlem and Legge Anti-Kebab that apply to the region of Lombardia, the ordinances in the Rules of the Urban Police of Brescia apply only to the province itself. According to the proposed regulations, individuals who live in the province of Brescia who sit or stop to rest on the steps of the monuments are subject to a 100 Euro fine if caught by the local police. According to the text of the policy, the purpose of the ordinances listed under the Security and Quality of the Urban Environment section is to “safeguard the security and the decorum of the territory of the province”<sup>25</sup>. The storylines and ideographs that fuel the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative are evidenced in the policy proposal narratives put forth by the Province of Brescia. When discussing the motives behind the proposed legislation, local official Mario Labolani proclaimed that the

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<sup>23</sup> Spatola, G. (2009, August 11). Si siede sui gradini del monumento Marocchina multata. *Corriere della Sera*.

<sup>24</sup> Comune di Brescia Regolamento di Polizia Urbana, no. 105/15616. (2009, June 15). Section 1, Article 7.

<sup>25</sup> Comune di Brescia Regolamento di Polizia Urbana, no. 105/15616. (2009, June 15). Section 1, Article 7.

area was transformed into “an encampment of loiterers”<sup>26</sup>. These individuals, who are portrayed in the media as immigrants, become the explicit targets of the policy. The use of the word ‘encampment’, which denotes an area occupied by a large group of people, reflects the notion of settlement. This perpetuates the belief that a large number of immigrants have put down roots, ‘invading’ an area that was once frequented solely by Italians. Moreover, the nature of the ordinances and their location under the ‘Security and Urban Decorum’ section of the Rules of the Urban Police of Brescia links ordinances targeted towards immigrants to the policing efforts of the province. While the policy proposal texts do not specifically say that they want immigrants to leave the space, the storylines in news media discourse and the ‘security’ and ‘order’ ideographs embedded in political discourse represent origins of the debate over the urban and social fabric that are allegedly influenced by an outside group.

According to *Transatlantic Trends*, the immigration survey conducted by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, 54% of the Italians polled felt that there were too many migrants in Italy in 2008<sup>27</sup>. This number also represents the highest percentage of Italians over a four year period who felt that there were too many immigrants in Italy. The spike in the number of individuals who perceive immigrants as being too populous is also the highest during a time in which the media was saturated with storylines about large numbers of immigrants who ‘gathered’ in city centers. Shortly following this period, the mayor of Gavardo decided that the streets of Gavardo resembled “the living room of a house”. This spike in this figure could also be attributed to media coverage of Lampedusa,

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<sup>26</sup> Spatola, G. (2011, January 11). Immigrati e spaccio: via le panchine; Gli anziani protestano. *Corriere della Sera*, pp. 11.

<sup>27</sup> German Marshall Fund of the United States, (2011). *Transatlantic trends: Immigration survey*. Retrieved from <http://trends.gmfus.org>.

however, and the ‘invasion’ ideograph that polluted the Italian news media. Aside from external migratory phenomena, the spike in the number of individuals who feel that there are too many immigrants coupled with evidence that a majority of Italians hold this perception gives the relevance of the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative additional credibility during this time period. In relation to criminality, *Transatlantic Trends* reported that, 77% of the Italians surveyed in 2009 felt that illegal immigrants increased crime<sup>28</sup>. Approximately 30% less of the individuals surveyed, or 34% total, felt that immigrants who legally resided in Italy increased criminality<sup>29</sup>. The figures cited in *Transatlantic Trends* support the notion that perceptions of the illegal immigrants were worse than perceptions of the legal immigrants which could be influenced by either the news media or political discourse discussed in the analysis. Other factors, such as individual experiences or perceptions of arrests and police activity, could also have had an influence on the Italians who were polled, and media and political discourse cannot be considered as the most relevant factors for each individual. Integrating these figures in the analysis, however, provides further credibility to the relevance of the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narrative as a set of discourses that is consumed by civil society. Last, among the European Union countries who participated in the *Transatlantic Trends* survey in 2011, the highest percentage of individuals (80%) who worry more about illegal immigration than legal immigration resided in Italy<sup>30</sup>. While this figure could also be linked to the nature of the informal Italian economy that relies on foreign, illegal labor, it also

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<sup>28</sup> German Marshall Fund of the United States, (2011). *Transatlantic trends: Immigration survey*. Retrieved from <http://trends.gmfus.org>.

<sup>29</sup> German Marshall Fund of the United States, (2011). *Transatlantic trends: Immigration survey*. Retrieved from <http://trends.gmfus.org>.

<sup>30</sup> German Marshall Fund of the United States, (2011). *Transatlantic trends: Immigration survey*. Retrieved from <http://trends.gmfus.org>.

demonstrates that concerns about the illegal immigrant that were voiced in the news media resonate with civil society.

### *Observations*

In the previous section of this analysis, I demonstrated how discourse about Muslim immigrants that originates at the micro level of civil society is reflected in political discourse, or policy narratives, at the macro, institutional level. The evolution of discourse from the micro level of civil society to the macro level of politics is accomplished through storylines about Muslim immigrants in the news media and ideographs evidenced in political discourse which create a dominant narrative or way of thinking about Muslim immigrants in Italian society. The presence of the dominant narrative leads to the creation of a policy proposal narrative that seeks to address concerns that are voiced about Muslim immigrants in Italian society.

Two dominant narratives, the 'their religious and cultural differences are a threat' narrative and the 'invasion and threat to public order' narrative, that are present in Italy were examined in further detail. The 'their religious and cultural differences are a threat' dominant narrative was based upon storylines in the news media about the presence of non-European Union businesses in Italian city centers and the loss of local, 'traditional' Italian dishes. These storylines were given more meaning when politicians deployed the 'value', 'tradition', and 'protection' ideographs in statements following these conflicts. The Legge Harlem, or 'Harlem Law', resulted as a policy proposal narrative that sought to limit the number of businesses in Italian city centers that do not reflect 'European' culture. The 'invasion and threat to public order' dominant narrative was based on storylines in the news media where coffee shops frequented primarily by immigrants were shut down for

'reasons of public order' or benches were removed in an Italian city center so individuals would not use them late into the night. These storylines were given more meaning and validity through the use of the 'order' and 'security' ideographs in political statements that portrayed immigrants as a threat to the public order of the city center. As a result, policy proposal narratives featuring the Legge Anti-Kebab, or Anti-Kebab Law, and the Rules of the Urban Policy of Brescia – Security and Urban Decorum surfaced to ameliorate these concerns.

After breaking down these dominant narratives and examining their individual parts, additional observations were made, aside from identifying their structural components. First, hostile discourse about Muslim immigrants is no longer a feature of solely far-right political parties in Italy. According to Sinno, hostile discourse about immigrants does not just come from conservative groups, and civil society as well as politicians are more willing to politicize every day interactions with Muslim individuals in the European public sphere (2013). While Sinno's study did not focus on Italy exclusively, this analysis supports the phenomenon that Sinno observes. Although the majority of the discourse used in the data section of this analysis originated from Lega Nord politicians, the Confesercenti, a politically neutral group, also contributed to the discourse surrounding the Anti-Kebab law. Furthermore, the Council of Lombardia, the regional, legislative body through which the Legge Harlem and the Anti-Kebab law were proposed, did not strike down the final policy proposals. While the Council of Lombardia is composed of representatives from both left- and right-wing political parties, the local ordinances could not pass with the Lega's support alone. Other parties, aside from the Lega Nord, played a role in moving the policy proposals through the Council's legislative channels. Discourse at

the micro level of civil society did not overwhelmingly contribute to the politicization of religion and immigration; rather, micro conflicts involving Muslim immigrants that were discussed in the news media were inflated by politicians through the use of ideographs derived from the news media's language. Although discourse in the Italian news media was more hostile towards religious or ethnic minorities than it was inclusive, there were instances where the news media presented both points of view or promoted multiculturalism. If popular Italian news mediums employed this type of language on more occasions, the presence of more inclusive discourse could influence the perceptions of Italian individuals who read the news but who have never met an immigrant to formulate their own perceptions.

Second, the dominant 'their religious and cultural differences are a threat' and the 'invasion and threat to public order' narratives are not new constructs; rather, the linguistic pieces and storylines on which these narratives are built is different than in the past. Discourse about the use of public space in Italy has previously focused on cultural preservation as reflected in the 'their religious and cultural differences are a threat' narrative today. The ancient Roman concept of *genius loci*, or the 'spirit of a place', for instance, refers to the preservation of a particular atmosphere (Clevis, n.d.). *Genius loci* also determines the nature of a space and how individuals experience it. From late antiquity to the modern era, the concept of *genius loci* has had an effect on the design and interpretation of different landscapes (Clevis, n.d.). Therefore, narratives based on the cultural preservation of a place are not a novel concept in Italy; on the contrary, they are deeply rooted in notions stemming from Roman antiquity. In modern times, for instance, the concept of *genius loci* was embedded in debates over the installation of McDonalds



restaurants in Rome. Although there are currently several McDonalds locations in Rome today, the opening of a McDonalds in Piazza Spagna near the Spanish steps was extremely controversial due to the historical value of the space to the city. The idea that certain types of food or cultural elements are not compatible with a particular Italian space received renewed attention, and shortly following, kebab shops and non-EU businesses located in historical city centers were under scrutiny. Through the identification of storylines that mirror similar concerns, this study demonstrates that the narrative identified in this analysis is related to the notion of *genius loci*. It also demonstrates that concerns about 'the spirit of a place' are similar over time but also dynamic in that the way to approach the preservation of a space varies depending on the storylines deployed, the politicians involved, and the policies used to target a particular behavior.

Like the 'their religious and cultural differences are a threat' narrative, the 'invasion and threat to public order' concept is not novel; rather, the storylines in the Italian news media and the slogans created by politicians give this previously existing narrative new meaning. Following political events that the media connects to Islam, but especially the September 11 terrorist attacks, the links between Islam and violence grew exponentially stronger (Mamdani, 2002). Mosque construction in Italy become extremely controversial as local residents felt that mosques were meeting areas the bread crime and terrorism. Even prior to September 11, the securitization of immigration, or the linking of immigration to a problem of national security, characterized political discourse about immigration, whether corresponding to the arrival of Albanians or African individuals. Thus, the link between violence and Islam existed before the period in question. The contribution of this analysis, however, is the identification of new storylines around which

discourse about immigrants and public order are articulated. The storyline about a business closing due to the presence of illegal immigrants that fueled the dominant 'invasion and threat to public order' narrative in this analysis is not new to the Italian news media. The storyline featuring the removal of benches in a piazza in Gavardo, on the other hand, is unique to Gavardo and the time period in question. While the resulting 'order' and 'security' ideographs were largely the same as in previous time periods, the micro conflicts around which politicians mobilized vary depending on the context. Examining the storylines that are at the root of this dominant narrative will provide further insight into the storylines and micro conflicts that mobilize politicians or civil society to take action. An awareness of the storylines around which discourse is articulated could help policy makers put forth a more inclusive discourse by avoiding the politicization of these storylines in question.

#### *Limitations & Additional Considerations*

In the discussion section of this analysis, I demonstrated how discourse about Muslim immigrants that originates at the level of civil society is reflected in policy proposal narratives at the macro, institutional level through a process that includes the mediation of this language through multiple channels. Aside from the contribution of media and political discourse to dominant societal narratives about Muslim immigrants, there are additional considerations when assessing the mediation process and the presence of this discourse in Italian society. There are also limitations to this analysis that were not within the scope of the study.

First, this analysis addressed discourse that originates at the micro level of civil society. Discourse, however, can also originate at the level of politics for motives unrelated

to what occurs on the micro level. Discussion about salient topics, such as immigration or religious minorities, can manifest close to an election date or when a politician is looking to capture extra votes. The politicization of immigration could encourage voters who are in the process of selecting a candidate to vote for a particular individual if they remain undecided. In 2008, Silvio Berlusconi was elected to office. Italian voters also elected members of the Popolo della Liberta (PdL) and Partito Democratic (PD) to the European Parliament in 2009. Prior to the election, members of the PdL, PD, or Silvio Berlusconi himself expressed their views on immigration to the Italian public. This could have included speeches, statements made in interviews, or visual propaganda to solicit votes and extra support. Discourse that was created and deployed for political gains, which was not examined in detail in this analysis, could have inflated the severity of issues involving Muslim immigrants. Moreover, it would be difficult to determine which types of discourses at the level of politics were intended to garner votes, which were products of storylines in the news media, or if they were a mixture of both. While this information would provide additional insight in regards to when certain types of discourses are employed, it is not essential to demonstrate how discourse originates from storylines in the media and is reflected in policy proposal narratives, which was the objective of this analysis.

Second, this analysis does not measure the cognitive effect of the ‘their religious and cultural differences are a threat’ narrative and the ‘invasion and threat to public order’ narratives. The analysis established the existence of these narratives in Italian society today; however, it does not address whether or not the narratives succeeding in altering the way Italians think about Muslim immigrants. Although the *Transatlantic Trends* survey results were briefly discussed to support the relevance of the narratives to the Italians

polled, information regarding the influence of the media and political discourse specific to this analysis was not gathered. While useful, this information was not needed to conduct the metanarrative analysis and examine the structure of narratives about Muslim immigrants in Italy.

### *Directions for Future Research*

There are several different directions that future research that explores dominant narratives and discourse about Muslim immigrants in Italian society could take. First, additional analysis could examine more inclusive narratives that compete against the hostile discourse. This analysis briefly highlighted examples from Italian news media discourse that made up the more inclusive narratives. These storylines either portrayed cultural diversity in a positive light or interviewed members of the immigrant community to allow them to voice their concerns about the Anti-Kebab ordinance or security measures that target Muslim immigrants. Although these storylines were present, the narratives were largely incomplete. When politicians responded to civil society, the ideographs derived from their political discourse did not drive the dominant narrative to the level of the policy proposal stage. Although these narratives are incomplete, additional examination of the narrative's structural components could reveal the point at which the more inclusive discourse becomes irrelevant. This could provide further insight into the types of discourse that resonates well with society as well as the types of language that mobilizes the public to think or behave in a certain way.

In addition to the competing, more inclusive narratives about Muslim immigrants in Italian society, future analysis could seek to examine the effects of this type of discourse on the number of arrests, written citations, or legal action taken against immigrants groups.

While this was not within the scope of the original analysis, additional examination would reveal if the ordinances that resulted from the policy proposal narratives had an effect on the number of immigrants that were either profiled or arrested. Determining if the number of arrests or legal action taken as a result of the ordinances increased during a given year would also impact perceptions of immigration held by civil society. Witnessing an overwhelming number of immigrants who are arrested and featured in the news would further criminalize immigrants who reside legally in Italy.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This purpose of this analysis was to examine the transformation of discourse about Muslim migrants from the level of civil society in Italy into policy narratives at the macro, institutional level. More specifically, the analysis examined how media and political discourse drive dominant narratives that are eventually reflected in policy proposal narratives at the macro level. In order to understand the narratives that marginalize religious and ethnic minorities, this thesis sought to answer:

*What are the characteristics of media and political discourse that drive narratives about Muslim immigrants from the micro level of civil society to the macro level of policy proposal narratives?*

Using Italy as a case study, I argued that narratives about Muslim individuals originating from micro conflicts at the level of civil society are reflected in policy narratives at a macro level.

A metanarrative analysis was conducted to determine the characteristics of media and political discourse that influence dominant narratives about Muslim immigrants present in Italian society. The metanarrative analysis was also a tool for determining how media and political discourse contributed to the creation of policy proposal narratives at the macro, institutional level. The dominant narratives that emerged as a result of this analysis, which were the 'their religious and cultural differences are a threat' narrative and the 'invasion and threat to public order' narrative, describe the ways in which Muslims are thought of in Italian society. These dominant narratives were based on perceived threats to the culture of the public sphere as well as threats to order and security. Starting with three policy proposal narratives focused on the Legge Harlem, Legge Anti-Kebab, and the

Security and Quality of the Urban Environment section of the Rules of the Urban Police in the province of Brescia, I determined that politicians deploy 'value', 'protection', 'tradition', 'order', and 'security' ideographs in political discourse prior to formulating a policy proposal narrative. I also determined that the media utilizes storylines that highlight threats to public order, the occupation of an 'Italian' public space by Muslim immigrants, or a loss of local traditions to create a dominant narrative.

As a result of the examination of these dominant narratives present in Italian society, policy makers will have a better understanding of the discourse that marginalizes Muslims at both the micro level of civil society and the macro, institutional level of politics. Although the European Union's "united in diversity" motto is put under scrutiny, an opportunity is put forth to provide a more inclusive narrative that corresponds with the European Union's "united in diversity" motto and paves the way for greater acceptance in both European and Italian society.

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