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Our Bodies, Their Choice: A Comparative Study of the Italian Pro-Life Actors.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	5
List of Abbreviations.....	6
0. Abstract.....	7
1. Introduction.....	8
2. Chapter 1: Social Movements and the Cultural Construction of Abortion	11
2.1. Why Focus on Social Movements?	11
2.2. Culture Wars: Conceptual Foundations	19
2.3. Moral Politics in Western European Countries	22
3. Chapter 2: Methodological contributions	26
3.1. The anti-abortion mobilisations: Research questions and hypotheses	26
3.2. Data collection and methods	27
3.3. Data collection methods	28
3.4. Operationalization	34
3.5. Data analysis method	35
3.6. Ethical Considerations.....	36
4. Chapter 3: Governing the Womb – Legal Histories and Moral Contention in Italy	37
4.1. Opening Statement	37
4.2. The Italian context.....	38
4.3. Defining the Italian Anti-abortion Movement	42
5. Chapter 4: Empirical Analysis and Findings – The Italian Anti-Abortion Movement and Its Evolving Strategies.....	56
5.1. Abortion in Italy	56
5.2. Strategic Evolution of Italian Anti-Abortion Movements.....	60
5.3. Discursive Evolution and Reconfiguration Frames	102
6. Synthesis: Comparative Findings Across the Three Periods and the Four Italian Anti-Abortion Associations	108
7. Conclusion.....	115
8. Bibliography.....	119
8.1. Scientific Articles.....	119
8.2. Scientific Books	120
8.3. Online Sources	121
8.3.1. Newspapers	122
9. Annexes.....	123
9.1. Interviews Transcription	123

List of Tables

Table 1. Empirical Material: Interviews were conducted as a primary source of empirical material from the 11th of February 2025 to the 28th of February 2025. Pg 32

Table 2. Qualitative Materials: Campaigns, Petitions, Legislation, Manifestos, Reports, Referendums, and Speeches (1978-2025). Pg 33-34

Table 3. A Diachronic Analysis of Strategy Shifts within Italian Anti-Abortion Movements (1970s–2020s) Pg 108

Table 4. Comparative Overview of Italian Anti-Abortion Movements: Strategic Orientations, Discursive Framings, Sources of Funding, and Political Affiliations Pg 109

List of Abbreviations

MpV *Movimento Per la Vita Onlus*

0. Abstract

Abortion is a provocation. Abortion is murder. Abortion is a choice. Between women's bodily self-determination and the act of taking the life of a human being/child in the womb, abortion vacillates among ideologies, dogmas, and doctrines. Over time and across decades, voluntary termination of pregnancy has been constructed as a cultural war and a moral politics, rather than as an integral component of a state's public health policies, polarizing society, public opinion, and political debate. Within this controversy, factual statistics and scientific realities carry little weight compared to beliefs, propaganda, and ideologies. Abortion thus becomes a privileged site for studying the interaction between political institutions, social movements, and countermovement.

Pro-life movements have been striving to dismantle the right to voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy and at the European level, resorting to a variety of tactics. Recent research has demonstrated the adaptation of their repertoires of action and discursive framings. This evolution reflects the growing interest of these new pro-life movements in bringing abortion back to the centre of public and political debates (Prearo, 2023). Despite the increasing scholarly attention paid to the strategies of anti-gender movements, the specific study of the evolution of anti-abortion movements' strategies remains comparatively marginal within the existing body of literature.

Focusing on the Italian case study, I therefore pose the following question: *“How have the strategies and discursive framings of Italian anti-abortion/pro-life movements changed from the 1970s to the 2020s?”* This research confirms the renewal and transformation of the repertoires of action and discursive framings of Italian pro-life movements, particularly from 2003 onward. Before 2003, no significant change occurred: their strategies remained traditional, conventional, and doctrinally aligned with the Vatican's stance, rooting these actors' mobilization durably and continuously within the public and political sphere. Moreover, the period 2007–2012 marked the beginning of their professionalization and democratization, through the adoption of new tactics, axiology, and anti-gender, neo-Catholic semantics, such as those of contamination and contagion. From 2012 onward, this extra-ecclesiastical mobilization, at times with radical overtones, became increasingly institutionalized. Indeed, the fusion between the Italian government and these actors introduced a new dimension: Italian pro-life actors metamorphosed into political lobbyists. This study, therefore, concludes that a dual transformation has taken place: both in the strategies and discursive framings of Italian

pro-life actors, as well as in the very essence of these actors themselves, accompanied by the growing involvement of political institutions.

1. Introduction

Counter-movements, such as anti-abortion mobilizations and more broadly pro-life movements, have experienced a resurgence of support and success in recent years across many European countries. These social actors have gradually transformed into intrinsically political lobbies, both in their strategies and in their discursive framings. The legacy of the sexual revolution of 1968 and the democratization of gender studies, integrated into the public, political, and international spheres, enabled traditional and historical anti-abortion movements to renew themselves and undergo transformation. Notable examples, such as *La Manif pour Tous* in France, *CitizenGo* in Spain, and *Ordo Iuris* in Poland, all demonstrate one key point: the return of identity, cultural, and moral battles, such as abortion, to the political and public agenda. This politicization of abortion stems both from pro-life actors themselves and from religious and political extremists.

Accordingly, the scholarly literature conceptualizes these movements as “counter-movements,” fundamentally positioned against and rejecting social, economic, and human rights progress. However, anti-gender and anti-abortion movements are more than mere counter-movements. Indeed, the success of anti-gender and anti-abortion campaigns reaffirms this distinction. Their triumph is grounded in the renewal of repertoires of action and discursive framings: a semantic shift towards the construction of a new common enemy, gender theory, which, according to them, undermines the natural symbiosis of male-female union that structures Western civilization (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2020). Their repertoires of action have also recalibrated through the adoption of new modes of mobilization, more radical, populist, and at times extreme (Prearo, 2023). Nevertheless, these findings must be nuanced, as national particularities persist; yet, at the European level, significant similarities can be observed.

As a result, abortion has become the central issue dividing European societies and mobilizing anti-abortion and anti-gender movements across the continent. More than a medical matter, abortion crystallizes moral, cultural, and ethical stakes. It has acquired symbolic power, reinforcing binary categorizations and dichotomous oppositions of good versus evil. In other words, abortion embodies the contemporary cultural war and constitutes a moral politics that intrinsically divides society.

Considering existing scholarship, the construction of this puzzle on anti-gender and anti-abortion movements has led me to formulate the following research question: “*How have the*

strategies and discursive framings employed by Italian pro-life actors changed from the 1970s to the 2020s?” Several explanations may account for the evolution of these actors. In this research, the primary factors analysed will be their strategies, repertoires of action, and discursive framings across key moments of mobilization.

My study will therefore focus specifically on the Italian case. While many countries experience this phenomenon, Italy represents a particularly distinctive case, where anti-abortion movements are characterized by multidimensionality, religious, activist, and political dimensions, within their organizational structures. This multidimensionality reshapes their axiological and strategic matrix, imbuing these mobilizations with renewed meaning and a political project. Moreover, Italy is among the countries with the highest rate of conscientious objection, with nearly 71% of gynaecologists invoking this provision (Autorino, Mattioli, and Mencarini, 2020, pg 2).

To conduct this research, I adopt a qualitative and comparative approach centred on the analysis of strategies and discursive framings of four Italian anti-abortion actors: *Movimento Per la Vita*, *ProVita e Famiglia*, *NonSiToccaLaFamiglia*, and *Il Popolo della Famiglia*. The empirical material consists of a set of semi-structured interviews with both pro-choice and pro-life actors, complemented by a qualitative corpus of documents (1978–2024), including newspaper articles, speeches, and legislative texts. First, I will conduct a qualitative analysis of sixteen interviews to trace potential evolutions in the strategies and discursive framings of these movements regarding abortion, to understand the process of their transformation. Second, to broaden and enrich the analysis, I will complement this empirical material with qualitative document analysis to assess whether this transformation is also observable in the redefinition of abortion, gender, and family values. This methodology will thus enable me to connect and cross-reference the collected data, thereby achieving a more comprehensive and critical understanding of the phenomenon.

Therefore, this dissertation is organized as follows. I will begin by introducing the issue and reviewing the scholarly literature on anti-abortion movements, which conceptualizes them as counter-movements, followed by a discussion of the concepts of moral politics and cultural wars. After this in-depth literature review, I will present my research question and hypotheses, followed by my data collection methods and materials. Then, I will examine the specificities of the Italian context, with particular attention to the legal framework of abortion and the historical development of Italian anti-abortion movements. The empirical analysis is structured in two main parts: first, an assessment of the evolution of anti-abortion strategies in Italy between 1978 and 2024; second, an examination of the parallel evolution of discursive framings employed by

Italian pro-life actors during the same period. The final section will synthesize the empirical analysis by presenting two comparative tables, offering an overall and critical understanding of the evolution of Italian anti-abortion movements. Finally, I will conclude by addressing the limitations of this dissertation and research.

2. Chapter 1: Social Movements and the Cultural Construction of Abortion

2.1. Why Focus on Social Movements?

In this research, I have chosen to study social movements and the mobilization strategies they deploy around specific issues, thereby structuring and driving social change. This analytical framework allows me to examine how these social actors contribute to change in abortion by producing collective dynamics and strategies that facilitate the emergence of new norms. These norms serve to legitimize and guide their collective actions. Specifically, I have chosen to focus on anti-abortion movements to understand how a mobilizing force can reshape the conditions, framework, and practical accessibility of a legally recognized right, such as abortion, by rendering it socially and politically contentious through their strategies and discursive framings. These actors construct abortion as a cultural, moral, political, and public conflict.

2.1.1. Defining Social Movements and Countermovements

A social movement is “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of a society's social structure and /or reward distribution (McCarthy and Zald, 1997, pg 1217-1218)”. Social movements involve “the emergence of new rules and norms and represent attempts to transform existing norms”(Porta & Diani, 2006, pg 13). These actors are characterized by (1) alignment in their objectives, particularly in the contentious forms of collective action; (2) organizational mode grounded in informal networks; (3) a shared ideological orientation coupled with common collective identities (Porta & Diani, 2015). In essence, social movements are organized groups of people and actors through collective action that share a common purpose “to promote social and/or political change (Corredor, 2019, pg 617)”.

Thus, this study focuses on countermovements, particularly those that oppose the expansion of reproductive rights, through the analysis of anti-abortion mobilizations. These movements aim to uphold the status quo regarding abortion and to challenge the normative and institutional foundations that guarantee its access.

In the academic literature, such actors and forms of mobilization are defined as "countermovements." A countermovement can be understood as a “conscious, collective, and organized attempt to resist social change (Mottle 1980, pg 620).” Moreover, countermovements emerge through their efforts to influence policy, reshape political alignments, and raise the public visibility and salience of the contested issue. The scientific literature demonstrates that these movements are « inherently conservative (...) more likely to receive strong elite or

institutional support (Molt, 1980, pg 621) ». They are therefore supported and driven by religious, political, or economic elites. However, they cannot be conflated with political parties, state institutions, or judicial bodies, as their very nature lies in challenging social progress that threatens their dominant position.

Like traditional social movements, countermovements are also composed of « a constellation of social actors, networks and organizations of shared concern that make sustained contrary claims to an opposing social movement's objectives and involve continuing, dialectical interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities (Corredor, E., 2019, pg 617)». Indeed, Mottle (1980) conceptualized the origins of countermovements originally embedded by the elite actors within the established institutions. In this perspective, I will define countermovements as « a social movement which is mobilized against another social movement opposing social change (Derich, C and Fennert, D; 2014, pg 17)».

Tilly (1986) identifies three major elements that must be present in the repertoire of collective action to define them as a social movement, or, in our case study, as a countermovement: campaign, social movement repertoire, “WUNC displays are participants' concerted public representation of worthiness, unity, and numbers and commitment (WUNC) (Tilly, 1986). Furthermore, for a social activity to be considered a countermovement, the scientific literature identifies four components: (1) a social movement challenges existing power ; (2) a privileged group feels its interests are threatened ; (3) the existing movements demonstrates signs of success; (4) opponents of the social movements must have political allies and access to resources to mobilize.

Moreover, the success of a countermovement lies in its ability to produce a strong and unifying political culture, understood as a set of symbolic productions that frame collective action, constructing the axiological and mobilizing legitimacy of the movement. This political culture is rooted “in cultural and subcultural structures, shaping the interpretive frames, narratives, and repertoires of action of a social movement (Prearo, 2023, pg 141) ». In addition, leadership, networks of interaction with public spheres, as well as the sense of belonging generated among target audiences, constitute key levers and central means for the movement's political influence (McCammon and Moon, 2015).

Consequently, according to the scientific literature, the anti-abortion movements meet all the criteria that can be analysed as counter-movements in their conceptualization and essence. The anti-abortion movement is a special form and type of social movement that comprises different kinds of groups, organizations, media, united by a shared will to challenge the right to abortion and to transform the political and institutional structures that ensure the

continued existence of this right (1). These actors are predominantly drawn from dominant religious, political, and economic elites, possessing privileged access to economic resources as well as connections with institutional and political spheres, which enhance their capacity for mobilization. This interaction between multiple spheres is intrinsic to anti-abortion movements (2, 3 & 4). Indeed, anti-abortion movements are distinguished by “competing claims on the state on matters of policy and politics and vie for attention from the mass media and broader public (Corredor, 2019, pg 618)”. These countermovements strategically position themselves under the label pro-life, presenting themselves as significant social actors through their Catholic leadership, invoking the ideals of world peace and social justice as legitimizing forces for their struggle. They stand in opposition to feminist movements, which they accuse of promoting a culture of death through the legalization of abortion rights. This binary rhetoric, "us" versus "them" aims to legitimize their mobilization by framing it as a moral and universal mission, carried out for the "good" of society (Porta & Diani, 2015; Roggeband, 2018).

Therefore, the emergence of an anti-abortion movement is particularly likely in « in contexts where the original movement addresses widely recognized issues in society is much higher (Derich, C and Fennert, D; 2014, pg 19). The rise of anti-abortion movements emerged as a reaction to the new wave of social movements in the 1970s (notably May 68), particularly the emergence of environmentalist and feminist movements, as well as the broader liberalization and globalization of social norms across the world, such as the legalization of divorce, female contraception, and women’s suffrage. To emerge and remain visible in the public sphere, promoting conservative family and religious values is essential, serving both to distinguish these movements and sustain their moral protest. In addition to opposing abortion, they also reject « extra-marital sex, pornography and sex on television (Lo, 1982, pg 114)».

The conceptualization of abortion facilitated the emergence of this protest movement as a contentious societal issue « abortion is an issue that has become widely recognized in many societies of the world, being variously framed by policy recommendations for family planning, poverty reduction, or reproductive health (Derich, C and Fennert, D; 2014, pg 19)”.

Finally, anti-abortion movements have succeeded in reinventing their discursive framings and strategies over time, notably through integration and alignment with the political spectrum. As a result, the intensity of the “anti-abortion movement (which came about in response to an increasingly popular abortion-rights movement) made it difficult to neglect the dynamics and interrelationships between opposing movements” (ibid, pg 17). Their strategic mobilization is naturally driven by a predefined repertoire of actions and tactics, deliberately

conceived and tactically considered, reflecting their enduring embeddedness within the field of social movements.

2.1.2. Strategies and Repertoires of Action

A countermovement's « organizational repertoire is shaped by the requirements of the political arenas in which it acts (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996, pg 1649)”. In the scientific literature, the repertoires of action of social movements and countermovements were initially and historically composed of protest as a primary means of strategic mobilization. Protests are defined as “sites of contestation in which bodies, symbols, identities, practices, and discourses are used to pursue or prevent changes in institutionalized power relations (Della Porta, 2013, pg 23) ». However, this mobilizing practice does not hold in historical reality: in the context of nation-states (17th–18th centuries) and the pre-industrial period, such actions were primarily promoted by elite and local actors seeking to defend particular or national interests (Tilly, 1986). With the advent of industrialization and the democratization of Western societies, repertoires of action and strategy evolved and were transformed. Therefore, this study will rely on Charles Tilly’s (1986) modern conceptual framework of repertoires of action and strategy to analyse the tactical and strategic practices of anti-abortion movements.

Beginning in the early 1960s, repertoires of action broadened to encompass a new array of strategies and forms of collective action. Tilly (1986) defines a repertoire of action as “a particular logic of action targeting political institutions and public authority through actions such as strikes, public targeting, and petitions”. The emergence of these strategic transformations and modes of action was made possible largely by the global expansion of democratic regimes, coupled with the industrial and economic rise of Western societies. The success of such repertoires of action and strategies is also shaped by how the media portray these mobilizations, as well as by their alignment with political actors. Consequently, the choice of a repertoire of action and strategy is fundamental to the construction and organization of anti-abortion movements. These repertoires are more than mere instruments or tools; they structure, shape, and « they belong to, and represent, a movement culture, and are therefore linked to the activist’s values (Della Porta & Pavan, 2017, pg 300)”. The determination of such repertoires reflects the ideological, cultural, and mobilizing orientation of anti-abortion movements. In the case of anti-abortion movements, the emergence of these repertoires of action and strategy stems from « demands, limiting the agenda of social movements (Roggeband, 2018, 25) ».

In the scientific literature, a social countermovement repertoire can be defined as “the employment of combinations from among the following forms of political action: creation of special purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings (...) (Della Porta, 2013, pg 27)”. Nevertheless, anti-abortion movements utilize a distinct set of actions and strategies, differentiating themselves from conventional social movements. Indeed, Mottl (1980) “argues that “anti” movements often have ties to powerful players and major institutions. Indeed, countermovements resist the social change they seek to prevent, as its implementation would imply « threatening their power position (Roggeband, 2018, 25) ». Thus, their repertoire of action and strategy adheres to an adaptive and evolving logic, enabling continual adjustment to effectively pursue their conservative objectives: « Mottl (1980) argues a conservative countermovements typically move from institutionally sanctioned strategies to non-violent direct action to violence if the particular goal is not attained, such as lobbying, letter-writing, boycotts, sit-ins (ibid.25)”. Then, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) highlight the critical interrelationship and mutual dependency between traditional social movements and conservative countermovements « adjust their strategies and tactics in response to one another (ibid. 25). For anti-abortion movements, this interaction is central to their respective development, as they mutually draw upon it, particularly in terms of shared repertoires of action and ideological affinities. Moreover, the scholarly literature, notably the work of Zald and Useem (1987), highlights the diverse and sophisticated array of oppositional strategies and tactics that characterize countermovements: « disrupting protest or actions, curtailing resources, infiltration, information gathering, appealing to authorities to restrict movement, and discrediting leaders or central figures (ibid.26)». Finally, the scholarly literature identifies another form of strategic tactic: the oppositional dynamic between feminist movements and anti-abortion movements. Whittier (2014) notably explores this tension) « points out that opposition may also lead to new collaborations between actors and organizations who had previously interacted only sporadically (ibid.25)”.

This research offers an additional definition and understanding of the opposition between social movements (feminist movements) and countermovements (anti-abortion movements), characterizing their relationship as one of “collaborative adversarial” a dynamic in which they may ally or cooperate when « be brought together by political opportunities around a specific issue or a broad-base threat (ibid, 25)». Nevertheless, despite occasional instances of cooperation, it is strategically advantageous for anti-abortion movements to maintain a posture of divergence and opposition toward feminist movements. Their actions are

largely coordinated and cohesive, both within national borders and across transnational contexts, especially through the deployment of globalized discourses and strategies.

An in-depth analysis of anti-abortion movements' traditional repertoires of action must also account for their symbolic and rhetorical discursive strategies, which are integral to their ideological positioning. These communicative mechanisms play a crucial role in sustaining mobilization over time and in producing a moral and symbolic construction of abortion as a social issue; « to persuade authorities and bystanders of the rightness of their cause (ibid, 26) » notably through framing contests. In the scientific literature, Molt (1980) « argues that movements and countermovements are engaged in an ideological struggle and competing for discursive or symbolic presence/dominance (ibid, 26) ». Consequently, anti-abortion movements employ discursive framing as a core mobilization mechanism, typically articulated around « the social construction of non-problematicity (ibid, 26) ». Furthermore, McCright and Dunlap (2000) show that they predominantly rely on problem-framing strategies: « problematicity is best conceptualized as an ongoing, contested process and not a definitive end-state once established, making framing contests a central element of movement-countermovement dynamics (ibid, 27) ». Thus, McCaffrey (2000) outlined three strategic frameworks through which anti-abortion movements symbolically and ideologically structure their actions, namely « polarization/vilification (nous vs them), frame saving, and frame debunking (advance their ideologies by discrediting competing owns) (ibid, 27) ». These discursive strategies bolster the deep-seated ideological and symbolic antagonism separating feminist and anti-abortion movements. In addition, the discursive frames adopted by anti-abortion movements may lead to secondary effects, such as « exacerbate intramovement battles over collective action frames (ibid, 27) ». These symbolic discursive strategies consequently provoke feminist movements to adopt more radical repertoires of action, strategies, and discursive framings, as well as to resort to alternative conceptualizations. Ultimately, the selection of repertoires of action and strategies by anti-abortion movements is essential for facilitating their seamless integration into the public and political spheres, as well as into transnational networks of anti-abortion mobilization. These repertoires must be capable of constant and continual renewal to avoid obsolescence, continuously adapting to the targeted constituencies they seek to influence. Anti-abortion movements deploy their strategies under the banner of moral conservatism, a narrative fundamentally rooted in a distortion of reality, ranging from the promotion of protecting the nation, religion, children, women, and the family, to the outright repudiation of political currents such as communism and liberalism, as well as international organizations like the United Nations (Ayoub and Stoeckl, 2024).

2.1.3. Political Integration and Transnational Networks

Integration into the political sphere is crucial for anti-abortion movements to enhance the visibility of their strategies and to achieve tangible outcomes in the public arena, thereby countering the social change promoted by the medical practice of abortion. Indeed, their incorporation into political institutions shapes and structures their repertoires of action and strategies. Moreover, the scholarly literature emphasizes that political opportunities vary across different social movements and countermovements: « each has its allies and its relationship to authorities, and each is a component in the political opportunity structure the other confronts (Meyer, & Staggenborg, 1996, pg 1637)».

Countermovements inherently involve interaction with state apparatuses, seeking to affect legislative outcomes on divisive social matters like abortion. In this context, anti-abortion movements strategically align themselves with right-wing and far-right political forces to reinforce their ideological positions and broaden their mobilization efforts in the public domain. This ideological alignment facilitates the advancement of conservative and anti-gender normative discourses by anti-abortion movements, including the promotion of traditional nuclear family values and pro-life stances. Through this strategic convergence, these movements continuously recalibrate their actions and rhetoric to align with the agendas of political elites, enabling coordinated mobilization efforts that reinforce their legitimacy and visibility within both public and political arenas (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). The adoption of a social issue such as abortion by political institutions contributes significantly to its recognition as a legitimate problem, thereby opening a discursive space within which all social actors are compelled to take a stance. This process of institutional recognition not only shapes the collective understanding of abortion but also guides the modes of its public treatment. Within this framework, political institutions inherently play a pivotal role in structuring anti-abortion movements, enabling the institutionalization or deinstitutionalization of their strategies as normative practices (Caiani & Tranfić, 2024). Finally, the dynamics of strategic mobilization are initiated and sustained by social and political elites, who play a fundamental role in facilitating the movements' integration into the political and public spheres.

The political integration of anti-abortion movements must be understood in a transnational context, encompassing their insertion into international networks of coordinated anti-abortion actors. These networks facilitate the development of uniform supranational strategies and enable collective, cohesive mobilization against abortion. The exchange and interaction within these countermovement networks are crucial for the renewal and sustained

momentum of anti-abortion activism. The scientific literature identifies five distinct models of mobilization employed by anti-abortion actors at the international level: (1) diffusion, (2) externalization, (3) internalization, (4) transnationalization, (5) upward scale shift (Munck, 2006). Furthermore, Caiani & Tranfić (2024) identify four elements that crystallise these actors into a transnational anti-abortion movement: (1) common Christian identity; (2) focus on the naturally conservative cultures and values, nuclear family ideology ; (4) the danger of gender ideology.

Each movement manifests unique national strategic and ideological characteristics that serve as models, inspiring other actors who recognize analogous features and subsequently adapt these frameworks to their national contexts and forms of activism. This dynamic contributes to a transnational convergence of mobilization practices, fostering a pluralistic yet cohesive international movement that poses significant challenges to the consolidation of democratic regimes (Meyer, & Staggenborg, 1996). Additionally, globalization has played a critical role in intensifying and diversifying international anti-abortion contestation by enabling the unrestricted and normalized diffusion of protest tactics and discourses surrounding abortion. Addressing the resulting fragmentation and diversity of repertoires is essential for maintaining the movement's coherence and efficacy (Caiani, & Tranfić, 2024). Furthermore, the modernization of technological and communication tools has propelled the interaction and coordination among anti-abortion movements into a new dimension: a continuous, fluid, and diffuse international online mobilization, operating without barriers or any centralized control and regulation. Moreover, at both international and transnational levels, these anti-abortion actors do not restrict themselves solely to exchanges with similar social movements. They extend beyond these traditional ties by engaging with advisory groups, NGOs, and think tanks. The involvement of these external actor groups significantly facilitates the organization of anti-abortion movements at the international level. More than a simple transnationalism, Della Porta (2006) demonstrates that we are now witnessing the emergence of a global anti-abortion movement as a « supranational network of actors that define their causes as global and organize protest campaigns that involve more than one state”.

The global interconnectedness of anti-abortion movements has given rise to a new worldwide cultural and moral order, characterized by a repertoire of action and strategies that promote a unified, global narrative opposing abortion. This movement is supported and propelled by global economic and political elites, who have repositioned and repoliticized issues of reproductive sexuality, gender, and sexual equality on the international agenda, thereby fuelling a democratic and political backlash against these topics. Anti-abortion

movements now constitute a constellation of international actors who share common values regarding abortion, pursue aligned objectives, and engage in nationally comparable and federated transnational mobilizations.

2.2. Culture Wars: Conceptual Foundations

2.2.1. *Defining the Culture War*

The concept of cultural war refers to a process through which an issue is progressively constructed as a contentious and divisive societal concern. Originally theorized within the American scholarly literature, particularly by Hunte (1991) defines “cultural wars as the arena of a major ideological confrontation between proponents of orthodoxy, who base their convictions on a transcendent authority and principles inherited from the past, and progressives, who advocate for rationalism and strive for societal transformation towards a more inclusive and pluralistic world (Nolan, 1996)”. This definition was originally conceptualized within the historical and political context of the United States, characterized by a strong religious influence conducive to ideological and cultural polarization.

Consequently, when transposed to the European context, the concept has been reformulated by Weigel (2006) who describe European cultural war as « the struggle to define the nature of civil society, the meaning of tolerance and pluralism, and the limits of multiculturalism in an aging Europe whose below-replacement-level fertility rates have opened the door to rapidly growing and assertive Muslim populations” (Ozzano, & Giorgi, 2015, pg 5). Cultural wars can also be understood as “the philosophical and ideological political conflict that can be waged internally within one state in which its members have opposite perceptions of how politics must be conducted (Sánchez-Prieto, 2023, pg 6)”.

However, cultural wars are more than mere ideological disputes or interpretive disagreements. They constitute « a struggle for meaning between antagonistic positions, affecting the question of identity by the return of emotions seeking the monopoly over the legitimate representation of one’s own identity (Sánchez-Prieto, 2023, pg 4)”. These cultural struggles aim to impose a particular framework of meaning and legitimacy around polarizing issues such as abortion, shaping public debate by reducing it to binary oppositions, such as “life versus death.” Within this perspective, culture wars emerge as ideological confrontations and analytical frameworks that structure both the public sphere and the political field. Indeed, « the culture war matrix serves as a heuristic tool to contain some of the central cultural war positions in an otherwise fragmented space of mediated discourse (Johansen, 2024, pg 47)”.

Moreover, scientific literature delineates three fundamental dimensions that define the structure of a cultural war: (1) diverging conceptions of moral authority over health means ; (2)

the discourses that result from these conceptions; and (3) the emergence of new political alliances surrounding the issue (Nolan, 1996). The actors engaged in these culture wars tend to frame societal conflicts through recognizable dichotomies and juxtapositions, strategically reinforcing a binary logic that sustains continuous ideological polarization around a given social issue. In addition, the literature identifies three principal models of cultural warfare that further delineate the dynamics and configurations of such conflicts: (1) Huntington's clash of civilisations (1996), (2) post-materialists and (3) the cultural war matrix. Culture wars surrounding abortion fall within the second model.

In their contemporary manifestation, culture wars have assumed a digital form, often referred to as online culture wars. These are driven by an ideological contamination of online content, sustained by politicized identities and ideological affiliations. This phenomenon contributes to the consolidation and expansion of a conflictual space around issues such as abortion.

In the end, the effects of these culture wars are reflected in “the growing fragmentation and heterogeneity of the social body, the pluralization of social identities, the weakening of ties and the greater vulnerability of people in the face of difficulties and experiences of crises (Sánchez-Prieto, 2023, pg 4)”. These dynamics are made possible through the discursive framings and strategic repertoires mobilized by actors engaged in such struggles. Abortion now stands as the paradigmatic example of this antagonistic conflict, polarizing public opinion, shaping the political field, and legitimizing the mobilization of anti-abortion movements.

2.2.2. Abortion as a Cultural Conflict

This research conceptualizes abortion as an issue that has progressively been constructed as a cultural war within contemporary European societies. It represents a paradigmatic case of cultural conflict, crystallizing deep and polarizing divisions across the social fabric. Abortion functions as a quintessential site of societal polarization, particularly around the competing conceptualizations of human life and bodily autonomy, laying bare profound moral and political cleavages within European societies. As Engeli (2009) observes, abortion constitutes « the mother issue that reactivated the religious-secular conflicts in the twenty-first century and drove the politicization of the other issues related to the beginning of life, namely stem cell research and assisted reproductive technologies, giving rise to several controversies » (Ozzano & Giorgi, 2015, pg 56). Within the European context, the reinstitutionalization and reproblematicization of voluntary termination of pregnancy have unfolded gradually, both at the national and supranational levels, concurrently with the democratization and legalization of various medical abortion practices.

Consequently, this process of constructing abortion as a culturally contentious issue results from a deliberate repoliticization orchestrated by the political sphere, notably initiated by European religious authorities and social institutions in response to the secularization and liberalization of societal order and moral norms that began with the events of May 1968. This period marks a pivotal turning point in the redefinition of the relationships between religious, political, and moral domains. Technological and scientific advances, particularly in vitro fertilization during the 1970s, profoundly altered conceptions of the beginning of life. These innovations contributed to an intensified politicization of bioethical issues surrounding the onset of existence, challenging the legal foundations and regulatory frameworks governing this medically sanctioned practice in the countries concerned: « The modern democratic states stemmed from a historical process of emancipation of the state apparatuses from religious bodies and values (Ozzano, & Giorgi, 2015, pg 6) ». Secularization induces a cultural, religious, and symbolic transformation that reconfigures the organization of social groups as well as the structuring of political and economic institutions.

This cultural war over abortion raises two fundamental questions: (1) the definition of the status of the embryo, and (2) the legal framework governing the right to bodily autonomy. On the one hand, the central issue in the cultural war surrounding abortion lies in the construction and conceptualization of voluntary termination of pregnancy as « whether it is a woman's right or an emergency procedure (the timeframe allowed and its financial coverage) (Ozzano, & Giorgi, 2015, pg 57) ». Indeed, this primary issue regarding abortion prompts a subsequent and equally significant question « the degree of women's and medical autonomy, precisely where this medical procedure can be performed and the status of underage women (Ozzano, & Giorgi, 2015, pg 57) », specifically, this concerns the location where the procedure is performed and the authority responsible for making the decision. Furthermore, the debate extends to the recognition of the legal and medical status of the embryo or foetus, whether as a subject of rights or a potential human being.

Voluntary termination of pregnancy thus becomes a morally ambiguous prism through which the boundaries of the beginning of human life are renegotiated. These two fundamental axes of tension are embedded within a normative framework marked by dichotomies of good and evil, revealing a post-materialist cultural crisis in Western societies where groups adhering to irreconcilable and antithetical value systems confront one another. Voluntary termination of pregnancy has become the arena of an ideological cultural battle, legitimized through its reconfiguration as a matter of moral politics, supported by institutional actors, and accompanied by the resurgence of countermovements that fundamentally contest the legitimacy of abortion.

This cultural politicization of abortion entails a continuous and ongoing renegotiation of the legal frameworks and social norms that define it.

2.3. Moral Politics in Western European Countries

Moral politics constitute a pertinent analytical lens through which to apprehend the dynamics by which abortion has progressively become institutionalized within public and political spheres. Mucciaroni (2019) defines moral politics as “those policies framed by advocates as inherent conflicts between core moral or religious principles, emphasizing their normative over empirical dimensions”. Furthermore, moral politics can also be defined as « the significant disagreement about the first principles (...) to validate one set of values at the expense of others (Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen, 2012, pg 24)”. Moreover, Mooney (2001) defines moral politics as “no less than the legal sanction of right and wrong of fundamental values». Thus, moral politics encompass issues such as same-sex marriage, end-of-life decisions, and abortion.

For a matter initially rooted in medical and public health domains, such as abortion, to evolve into a site of societal controversy framed within moral politics, the scholarly literature identifies four key factors contributing to this process of construction : (1) attention (the political one) ; (2) actor constellation around an issue (that are specialized in it) ; (3) policy image (framing) ; (4) institutional venue (structure the issue pursued) (Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen, 2012). The literature also distinguishes between American and European approaches in the study of moral politics. In the United States, analysis predominantly focuses on identifying the inherent conflictual dynamics shaping the development and implementation of moral policies. By contrast, the European approach adopts a comparative perspective on national differences across European countries, aiming to elucidate the structural and cultural variations in the regulation of moral policies, particularly through the lens of abortion.

Therefore, the religious dimension is central to the emergence of moral politics, which are intrinsically conflictual. It is important to clarify, however, that religion does not solely define moral politics; rather, it constitutes a functional and effective component within them. Esping-Andersen (1990) identifies two distinct realms and types of moral politics, the “religious” and the “*secular*” worlds, differentiating between contexts in which moral conflicts, such as abortion, preexist within the political system and party platforms, reflecting an intrinsic imperative to integrate these issues into the political agenda (religious world), and those where moral politicization emerges as a constructed and historically contingent process (secular world). Indeed, Minkenberg (2002, 2003) demonstrates « the importance of state-church

cultural relation in explaining the variation in abortion politics”. Moreover, the structuring of political conflicts around moral issues, such as abortion, depends on the role and capacity of religious actors to influence the political agenda (Green-Pedersen, 2007). In the end, Cook (1992) precise that there is « a strong correlation between the proportion of Catholics and the restrictiveness of abortion policy in the Western world”.

Moreover, « to explain variation in conflict definition around morality politics, it is necessary to appreciate the specific processes of conflict definition among political parties (...) (Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen, 2012, pg 11)”. Political parties, through their partisan affiliation, emerge as key agents in the conflictual framing of moral policies, grounding their polarization in the public sphere and political discourse. These debates may carry varying degrees of religious undertones, which play a role in the institutionalization and moral politicization of abortion. In this regard, Christian democratic parties, explicitly rooted in Christian values, occupy a central position in sustaining the moral dimension of these debates. The scholarly literature shows that the traditional left–right cleavage is insufficient to fully account for the moral politicization of abortion. This longstanding political conflict among parties can succeed in framing abortion as a moral policy issue only if « when conservative parties, for historical reasons, have a strong religious profile without being formally Christian Democratic (Conger, 2019, pg 8) ».

Moral policies are embedded within pre-existing and deep-seated value cleavages and conflicts over fundamental issues, where both religious and political forces mobilize to reframe abortion as a subjective and normative moral policy. This process integrates the issue into broader symbolic debates on life and death within the public sphere.

2.3.1. Abortion as a Moral Politics

Morality and moral issues are initially situated within the private sphere, allowing individuals to make choices autonomously. However, voluntary termination of pregnancy requires moral and public justification: one must provide a legitimate and valid reason for resorting to this medical practice. Abortion is not « a value-neutral issue, since it involves the issues of disposing of the life and bodily integrity of another human being (Peročević, 2023, pg 758). Thus, the moral vision of abortion held by a given community is reflected in its legal status. The regulation of abortion’s legal and juridical status is grounded in the establishment of political and moral norms, such as the status attributed to the foetus and the embryo. In the scholarly literature, abortion as a moral policy is defined as « studying the political conflicts and policy choices related to possible conditions on a woman’s rights (Engeli, Green-Pedersen,

and Larsen, 2012, pg 28) ». Accordingly, the moral dimension of voluntary termination of pregnancy is central to its construction as a moral policy.

Considering historically constructed moral norms, abortion has gradually emerged as a major ethical issue, often perceived as reprehensible and morally condemnable. This perception is rooted in a historical conceptualization of abortion as invoking an injunction toward death. Within this framework, the principle of “prima facie moral obligation (Brandt, 1974, pg 511)”, which posits an absolute prohibition against killing any human being, has been invoked to construct voluntary termination of pregnancy (VTP) as a deliberate act against human life, and thus as a form of criminal offense. As emphasized by, « Killing an innocent person is bad because of the characteristics of that act, taken in light of the underlying that justifies that moral judgment (Peročević, 2023, pg 760)». This reasoning rests on the foetus’s right to life, namely, the idea that once the fetus can experience emotions or sensations, it should be recognized as a full-fledged person endowed with fundamental human rights. This conceptualization is widely mobilized by religious, Catholic, and anti-abortion actors, who invoke it to legitimize a moral framing of abortion as an intrinsically immoral and criminal act, grounded in the transcendent authority of a divine order. However, this axiological stance is contested within the scholarly literature. Brandt (1974, pg 511) aligns with scientific research indicating that, at this stage, the foetus lacks any form of sentience due to its early developmental state. Furthermore, Brandt (1974) counters this constructed moral claim advanced by Catholic groups through three main arguments : (1) an abstention from providing help seems very different from actively killing,(...) abstention are morally not different ; (2) « allowing nature to take its course (...) has never been shown to have a moral standing different from abstention from using some artificial means; (3) permissibly directly to bring about the death of a person in some circumstances (Brandt, 1974)”.

It is within this context of contestation and moral reconfiguration that abortion has come to be constituted as a public moral issue, perceived as a threat to the natural social, political, and public order of Western societies. The progressive legalization of abortion after the Second World War marked a rupture, ushering in a new moral conceptualization and triggering the recent repoliticization of the issue. As a result, abortion emerges as a public cause framed as a moral policy. Indeed, it becomes embedded within the historical ideological cleavage between the political left and right, where two fundamentally opposed worldviews confront one another: on one side, liberal parties, advocating a reformist approach, defend the regulation and accessibility of abortion in the name of individual rights; on the other, conservative forces strive to maintain its illegality, grounding their stance in an essentialist and moralistic conception of

human life. Thus, abortion asserts itself as both a moral and political issue, with the prominence of public debates attesting to its enduring place within societal conflict.

In the 1970s, the issue of abortion transcended traditional partisan divides to become a public controversy marked by the confrontation of antagonistic and dichotomous groups with irreconcilable moral visions. Voluntary termination of pregnancy became polarized between notions of good and evil, emerging as a moral paradigm structuring social divisions. Furthermore, this moral reconfiguration of the medical practice was accompanied by a new discursive dynamic: the gendering of the debate.

Contemporary scholarly literature indicates a shift in the analytical framework of abortion, which is increasingly being conceptualized through the lens of the relationship « the pregnant person and the foetus explicit (Peročević, 2023, pg 758)». Indeed, this approach raises a fundamental tension between a woman's right to access abortion and the attribution of human rights to the foetus. Moral attention thus shifts toward the regulation of abortion access and its practical implementation. More recently, in Europe, a context of moral reactionism has reignited the debate and mobilizations against abortion, characterized by « anti-establishment populism, fuelled by the perceived elitist conservator and technocratic tendencies of the EU policies, especially in gender and sexual equality (Peročević, 2023, pg 759)». Thus, the consensus established around these sexual and reproductive rights has been challenged by the resurgence of conservative moral arguments grounded in traditional values. These discursive framings have contributed to reintroducing into the public sphere the notion of abortion as intrinsically immoral, thereby polarizing and simplifying the debate. The complexity of the issue is consequently reduced to a binary opposition between "rights/choice" and "life/death," rendering abortion both highly contentious and legally fraught.

3. Chapter 2: Methodological contributions

3.1. The anti-abortion mobilisations: Research questions and hypotheses

Anti-abortion actors' existence and presence highlight the fragility of both the accessibility and practicability of abortion in Europe and on a global scale. Research on anti-abortion mobilizations often focuses on a specific moment in time or on a particular organization.

My research aims to analyse the strategies and discursive framings employed by anti-abortion movements in addressing the issue of abortion. To this end, I have chosen to examine Italy. The selection of Italy as a case study is based on both empirical and theoretical considerations, allowing for an analysis of how rhetorical tools, mobilization strategies, and repertoires of collective action deployed by Italian anti-abortion movements have evolved.

Through this study, I seek to determine whether there exists a common repertoire of action, strategic approaches, and discursive framing shared among such actors. Therefore, I have chosen to approach my research through the independent variable of temporal and contextual factors shaping anti-abortion actors. This framework enables me to trace the evolution of anti-abortion movements in terms of collective mobilizations, strategies, and discursive framing from the 1970s to the 2020s. By focusing on the Italian case within a constructivist theoretical framework, I pose the following research question: *how have the strategies and discursive framings employed by Italian pro-life actors changed from the 1970s to the 2020s?*

Italian pro-life movements initially focused on the defence of the family and traditionalist values. However, this axiological foundation has evolved over time, becoming reconfigured around anti-gender theory and the contestation of the legitimacy of abortion, justified notably by neo-Catholicism and populism. This research spans a temporal framework from the 1970s (specifically 1974, the year of the adoption of Law 194 legalizing abortion in Italy) to the 2020s (notably 2024, the year of the preliminary adoption of a draft law allowing these actors to enter hospital waiting rooms).

My first hypothesis is that, since the 2000s, the institutionalization and professionalization of Italian pro-life actors have reshaped their strategies and repertoires of action, combining political and legal interventions with traditional forms of popular mobilization.

My second hypothesis is that the discursive framework of Italian pro-life actors, originally rooted in the moral-religious interaction of the 1970s, has shifted towards a dominant communication strategy centred on the right to life and anti-gender ideology.

Finally, my third hypothesis is that the neo-Catholic essence of contemporary Italian pro-life actors has transformed both their ideology and organizational structure, merging Catholic tradition with populist dynamics, thereby reinforcing their legitimacy and visibility in the public and political spheres.

3.2. Data collection and methods

3.2.1. Case study

My research focuses on a specific case: Italy. This case study stands out due to the density and diversity of anti-abortion movements, within which neo-Catholicism and anti-gender ideology occupy a central role, both in the associative sphere and in political discourse. Moreover, a distinctive phenomenon specific to the Italian context merits attention: over 71% of healthcare professionals in the country are conscientious objectors, refusing to perform voluntary terminations of pregnancy on personal ethical and moral grounds (Autorino, Mattioli, and Mencarini, 2020, pg 2).

Given the plurality of Italian associations and their complex interactions, my analysis will focus on two historical pro-life organizations, *Movimento per la Vita Onlus* and *ProVita e Famiglia Onlus*, as well as two more recent entities, *Non Si Tocca La Famiglia* and *Il Popolo della Famiglia*. Founded in 1975 and 2012, respectively, *Movimento per la Vita Onlus* and *ProVita e Famiglia Onlus* are among the founding actors of the anti-abortion movement in Italy. They have demonstrated a notable capacity to adapt to historical and contextual shifts. They continuously renew their support practices for pregnant women and defend the right to life, the traditional family, and parents' educational freedoms. In contrast, *Non Si Tocca La Famiglia* (2014) and *Il Popolo della Famiglia* (2016) are more recent organizations that operate within and derive legitimacy from an axiological framework centred on anti-gender ideology. These groups deploy new discursive framings, strategies, and outreach methods, targeting broader audiences while persistently reinforcing narratives that stigmatize women who undergo abortion. These four associations have been selected for analysis due to their ideological, associative, and political influence, as well as their capacity to institutionalize their actions within both civil society and formal political structures.

This research adopts a longitudinal and evolutionary approach to analyse the strategies and discursive framings employed by anti-abortion movements across four key moments in the Italian context. The first moment is the *1981 referendum (1)* on the partial repeal of Law 194. The second encompasses the period *from 2012 to 2016, marked by the 2012 March for Life, La Manif pour Tous Italia (2013), and the Family Day of 2015 (2)*, all organized by conservative Catholic networks. The third moment is the *2019 World Congress of Families in Verona (3)*,

which reflects a significant axiological shift toward anti-gender mobilization. The fourth moment corresponds to the beginning of the *Meloni government in 2022 (4)*, characterized by the legal opening of hospitals to pro-life associations and the publication of a Ministry of Health report, forty years after the enactment of Law 194. Analysing these four historical sequences will enable me to better understand the evolution and reconfiguration of the strategies of Italian anti-abortion movements across various domains: activist (e.g., the *Giornata per la Vita*), associative (e.g., anti-gender campaigns in schools), medical (e.g., crisis pregnancy centers), legal (e.g., the creation of legal support committees), and political (e.g., the integration of pro-life actors and ideological discourse into governmental structures). As noted by the organizers and founders of the 2012 March for Life, this event marked the emergence of a new mobilization space, distinct from earlier initiatives. As stated, “The truth is that on May 13, 2012, something significantly new took place in the Italian pro-life landscape” (p. 81, Praero, 2023). From this perspective, I have chosen to focus my analysis on the period spanning from the 1970s to the 2020s. This temporal framework will allow for a comparative examination of mobilization strategies from the inception of organized opposition to abortion through to its contemporary forms, considering potential evolutions over time.

3.3. Data collection methods

3.3.1. *Empirical corpus*

This research aims to understand the role and functions of anti-abortion movements and actors by analysing the evolution of the strategies employed by Italian pro-life groups through the key contextual moments outlined above. More specifically, for each association, and from a diachronic perspective, the goal is to identify their stance regarding Law 194, their dominant strategy, their primary target audience, as well as the main discourses mobilized either in the name of life or against abortion. Furthermore, this study also seeks to examine the potential existence of common features among these associations, intending to propose a possible systematization.

Firstly, to address my research objective, I have chosen to conduct semi-structured interviews to analyse the evolving dynamics within Italian anti-abortion movements. These interviews will be carried out with actors engaged on both sides of the debate, pro-life and pro-choice. I have deliberately chosen to interview groups with opposing positions and affiliations concerning abortion in Italy. This comparative approach is intended to enrich the analysis by providing a critical, contrasted, and in-depth perspective on the evolution of discursive strategies and modes of action adopted by Italian anti-abortion actors.

Secondly, in complement to this empirical approach, I am conducting a qualitative analysis of secondary sources, structured around a documentary corpus. First, key institutional and legal texts will ground the research within the legal frameworks governing abortion in Italy. I will then examine materials produced by Italian anti-abortion associations (including manifestos and online content) to confirm their ideological and strategic positioning on abortion. This will be followed by an analysis of strategic documents used in their actions (such as petitions, campaigns, and educational materials) and will conclude with the study of two key reports: one published by the Italian Ministry of Health, and the other by the NGO *European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights* (EPF).

3.3.1.1. Semi-structured Interviews

The selection of pro-life and pro-choice actors to be interviewed represented a critical step in structuring a rigorous analysis, one that not only reflects the research object but also captures its long-term evolution. The selection process began with a review of the existing scientific literature in October 2024. Consulting academic sources, particularly “*L’hypothèse néocatholique*” (Praero, 2023) and “*L’avortement dans l’Union Européenne*” (Lamoureux, 2021), enabled me to identify indices that systematically list Italian institutions, groups, and associations opposed to abortion and, more broadly, to gender-related issues. These directories provided an initial point of entry, allowing for a structured overview of the existence and configuration of these actors.

By combining insights from academic literature, especially the works of Giorgi (2022), Praero (2023), and Garbagnoli (2017), with documentary sources such as “*Avortement: les croisés contre-attaquent*” (2018) and “*Citizen Facts: Avortement – la croisade en ligne des anti-IVG* (2023)”, I was able to develop a detailed mapping of the interaction logics and coordination mechanisms among anti-abortion associations, both nationally and within broader European networks.

As part of this research, I compiled an Excel database listing approximately sixty key actors from both the pro-life and pro-choice spheres, detailing their roles, institutional affiliations, and contact methods. The selection was based on four main criteria: (1) the individual’s position of responsibility within their organization, (2) the institutional and geographic diversity of profiles, (3) their capacity to reflect on the evolution of mobilization dynamics, and (4) their accessibility for interview purposes.

In January 2025, I began the second phase of my research, dedicated to conducting interviews, by initiating contact with the previously identified actors. I initially adopted a

conventional approach via email. In cases of non-response, I relied on intermediary contacts from networks close to these milieus to obtain personal contact details of the targeted individuals. If these efforts proved unsuccessful, I turned to social media, sending direct messages via their personal or professional accounts. Finally, when all other strategies failed, I asked individuals who had already participated in interviews to recommend, when possible, other potential interlocutors willing to discuss this subject matter.

Following the establishment of this database, I compiled a sample of 16 individuals: 8 pro-choice actors and 8 pro-life actors. On the pro-choice side, I made a deliberate effort to include a plurality of perspectives to cross-reference views on the evolution of anti-abortion strategies in Italy. The sample includes two gynaecologists (medical perspective), one Member of Parliament (institutional perspective), four grassroots activists (activist perspective), and three association presidents (associative perspective). This diversity aims to avoid any one-dimensional or ideologically biased interpretation of the phenomenon under study, thereby ensuring an analytically rigorous approach independent of my convictions.

On the pro-life side, I targeted individuals holding senior leadership positions within the main Italian anti-abortion associations previously identified. The sample includes two presidents, two vice-presidents, and one family law attorney, to reflect the diversity of approaches and the specificities of each organization. I also included one editorial campaign directors, one gynaecologist, and one psychologist in a *Centro di Aiuto alla Vita* (CAV), a structure created by *Movimento per la Vita*, to better understand the concrete implementation of pro-life strategies in the field. This composition is intended to articulate the institutional, legal, and practical dimensions of pro-life strategic engagement in Italy. The representativeness of the sample was ensured by the diversity of the profiles interviewed.

I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews over three weeks in February 2025. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. All interviews were conducted online and recorded with the prior consent of the participants: fifteen were conducted in Italian and one in English. Transcriptions were produced using the AI-based tool *Turboscribe*, directly translating Italian to English, and subsequently reviewed carefully to ensure their fidelity to the content of the interviews.

3.3.1.2. Qualitative analysis

As part of the final stage of my data collection, I have incorporated an analysis of legal sources, beginning with Law No. 194 of March 22, 1978, which regulates the legalization of abortion in Italy. I consulted this law through the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* website (Legge 22 maggio 1978, n. 194) as it provides the foundational legal framework necessary to contextualize this study and to understand how abortion was initially conceptualized at the time of its adoption. I have also analysed Constitutional Court Decision No. 108, which addressed the attempted repeal of the law, an initiative rejected by referendum in 1981. This ruling, accessed via the official website of the Italian Constitutional Court (Corte Costituzionale), sheds light on the repositioning of pro-life organizations, which were compelled to redefine their strategic approaches in response to this legal outcome.

Furthermore, I will examine the proposed decree under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), debated during the parliamentary sitting No. 279 on April 15, 2024. This amendment authorizes regional governments to collaborate with “third-sector entities possessing recognized expertise in the field of maternal support” (Petrucchi, 2024). This document was accessed through the official portals of the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* (Italia, Decreto-legge 2 marzo 2024, n. 19) and the *Camera dei Deputati* (Camera dei Deputati, 2024, 15 Aprile).

To understand the genesis and ideological underpinnings of the mobilization, I will first analyse the *Lexicon of Ambiguous and Controversial Terms on Life, Family, and Ethical Issues*, an encyclopaedic dictionary published in 2003 and retrieved from the Vatican website (Pontificio Consiglio per la Famiglia, 2002, 8 December). This source is key to examining the emergence of a new strategic discourse within the Italian anti-abortion movement.

Subsequently, I will undertake a detailed examination of the manifestos and campaigns of leading anti-abortion associations to confirm and document this strategic revival. I will also consider materials from *Il Popolo della Famiglia*, available on their respective websites (Il Popolo della Famiglia, no date, *Chi siamo*). Additionally, I will analyse one key report: *Restoring the Natural Order*. This was accessed through their website (EPF, 2018).

Thus, these documents offer crucial insights into the evolution of anti-abortion repertoires of action, specifically the anti-genre and the neo-catholic shift. I will add an essential and recent journalistic investigation by Alliva and Vergine, which highlights the increasing institutionalization and professionalization of these actors, particularly through their ties with the far-right party *Forza Nuova*. This investigation was accessed via the online portal of

Domani Editoriale (Alliva, S., & Vergine, S., 2024, 5 décembre). As well as three other substantial articles, notably on : (1) The creation of an abortion helpline in Turin, a topic discussed exclusively by seven white men, some of whom are affiliated with **Fratelli d'Italia**; (2) the allocation of €1 million in funding to **Vita Nascente** by the Piedmont Region, (3) and the delay of the Italian government in publishing the annual report on abortion, reflecting a clear lack of rigor in providing essential and substantive data on the issue, together illustrate a broader strategy aimed at rendering the problem of abortion invisible. These journalistic articles will allow me to complement my empirical analysis concerning the legitimization and normalization of Italian anti-abortion movements within the public and political spheres. Finally, this understanding of their transformation will be further refined through the analysis of two interventions by Giorgia Meloni, one during the electoral period and the other at the beginning of her legislative term.

3.3.1.3. Summary Table of Interviews

Table 1. Empirical Material, Interviews were realised as a primary source of empirical material from the 11th of February 2025 to the 28th of February 2025.

Interviews	Interview Dates	Affiliations
I1	11/02/2025	<i>Pro-Life</i>
I2	12/02/2025	<i>Pro-Life</i>
I3	12/02/2025	Pro-Choice
I4	13/02/2025	Pro-Choice
I5	13/02/2025	Pro-Choice
I6	13/02/2025	<i>Pro-Life</i>
I7	14/02/2025	Pro-Choice
I8	18/02/2025	<i>Pro-Life</i>
I9	18/02/2025	Pro-Choice
I10	18/02/2025	Pro-Choice
I11	18/02/2025	Pro-Choice
I12	19/02/2025	<i>Pro-Life</i>
I13	19/02/2025	<i>Pro-Life</i>
I14	20/02/2025	<i>Pro-Life</i>

I15	20/02/2025	<i>Pro-Life</i>
I16	28/02/2025	Pro-Choice

3.3.1.4. Summary Table of Qualitative Analysis Sources

Table 2. Qualitative Materials: Campaigns, Petitions, Legislation, Manifestos, Reports, Referendums, and Speeches (1978-2025).

Law	L1	“Legge 22 maggio 1978, n.194” norme per la tutela sociale della maternità e sull’ interruzione volontaria della gravidanza (GU Serie Generale n. 140 del 22-05-1978).
Newspapers	N1	Gribaudo, C. (2025, 8 juillet). <i>Sette uomini a parlare di aborto e corpi delle donne</i> . Editoriale Domani. https://www.editorialedomani.it/idee/commenti/torino-stanza-ascolto-sette-uomini-parlare-aborto-ivg-corpi-donne-yuthf74r .
	N2	Alliva, S., & Vergine, S. (2024, 5 décembre). Tra #ProVita e #ForzaNuova non vi sono rapporti, vi è solamente un storico rapporto di amicizia tra me e #RobertoFiore. <i>Domani Editoriale</i> . https://www.editorialedomani.it/fatti/pro-vita-forza-nuova-riepilogo-inchiesta-affari-immobiliari-gnnpkcz7
	N3	Pennelli, F. (2025, 22 August). Dalla Regione Piemonte ancora un milione di euro al fondo “Vita nascente” per finanziare gli anti-aborto. <i>Editoriale Domani</i> . https://www.editorialedomani.it/fatti/dalla-regione-piemonte-ancora-un-milione-di-euro-al-fondo-vita-nascente-clnyspi3
	N4	Cirant, E. (2024, 3 December). <i>Aborto, la relazione 2024 inviata al Parlamento con quasi un anno di ritardo. E non c’è traccia della mappa dei luoghi per l’Ivg</i> . Il Fatto Quotidiano. https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2024/12/03/aborto-relazione-2024-ritardo-ministero-salute-parlamento-mappa-ivg-obiezione-coscienza/7790172/
Reports	R1	“ <i>Restoring the Natural Order (2018)</i> ”: The religious extremists’ vision to mobilize European societies against human rights on sexuality and reproduction – European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual & Reproductive Rights (EPF)

Referendum	R1	“Sentenza n.26/1981 della Corte Costituzionale” che dichiara ammissibili i referendum abrogativi parziali sulla legge 194 sull’interruzione volontaria di gravidanza.
Speeches	SP1	Meloni, G. (2019, 19 ottobre). <i>Discorso alla manifestazione Orgoglio Italiano</i> [Vidéo]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lh9AMSW_JM0
	SP2	Meloni, G. (2022, 25 ottobre). <i>Il primo discorso di Giorgia Meloni presidente del Consiglio</i> [Vidéo]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qztyNYNBMs
Supplement	S1	Suitetti.org. (2025, 20 juin). 2° Festival dell’“Umano tutto intero”. https://www.suitetti.org/2025/06/20/2-festival-dell-umano-tutto-intero/
	S2	“Prima La Famiglia (2025)”, Il Popolo della Famiglia

3.4. Operationalization

To operationalize the evolution of strategies employed by Italian anti-abortion movements in my interviews, I will structure my 16 interviews around four central axes: (1) Law 194; (2) the typology of actors and anti-abortion mobilizations; (3) the evolution of the associative spectrum; and (4) the shaping of their current stance through these evolving dynamics. The construction of each dimension is grounded in the interview guide as well as informed by a thorough review of the existing literature and data. These questions and dimensions have been deliberately designed to be broad, thereby allowing the various actors to articulate their experiences and perceptions regarding a sometimes-sensitive subject, enabling me to gather a more diverse and nuanced corpus of analysis.

I will pay particular attention to key variables such as abortion, gender, family, law, life, strategies, and evolution, thereby enriching the primary analysis of the interviews. This analytical approach will facilitate the construction of a comparative repertoire of action strategies and modes of engagement mobilized by anti-abortion movements over time. Beyond this content analysis, I will also examine the profiles of the interviewees, enable the triangulation of collected data, and further enrich the interpretation of their testimonies.

Conversely, to operationalize the qualitative sources, namely, laws, newspapers, and speeches, etc., I will employ an analytical framework analogous to the interpretative model used for my primary data. This will require a theoretical perspective privileging a discourse-

oriented reading focused on the lexicon and linguistic practices employed by these anti-abortion actors. I will focus on examining the issues surrounding “Interruzione Volontaria di Gravidanza,” contraception, reproductive and sexual health, conscientious objection, and legal status in two stages.

First, I will analyse the normative and moral frameworks based on concepts such as human rights, right to life, murder, equality, contraception, psychological consequences, stigmatization, guilt, feminism, and the nuclear family. These ideological frameworks and strategies will then be the object of a secondary analysis, addressing neocatolicism, populism, political engagement, types of mobilization, protest tactics, and governmental lobbying.

3.5. Data analysis method

This research aims to understand and observe the existence of an evolutionary change in the strategies of Italian anti-abortion movements. To achieve this, I will employ both interview analysis and document analysis methods. First, I will analyse the results of my interviews through specific questions formalized in a pre-established analytical framework designed for this purpose, as presented below:

- What were the major pro-life mobilizations in Italy following the legalization of abortion?
- What strategies were prioritized by the pro-life movements in different decades (1980s-1990s; 2000-2010s; 2020s)?
- What specific socio-political and legal factors have driven the pro-life movement’s shift in Italy?
- Would you describe today’s pro-life movement as influenced by Neo-Catholicism?
- How does it differ from traditional Catholic engagement in anti-abortion activism?
- What role do new Catholic intellectuals and conservative media play in shaping pro-life discourse today?
- Does the pro-life movement align with right-wing and far-right political parties in Italy?
- Is this a strategic or ideological alliance?
- In what ways has the pro-life movement in Italy integrated scientific arguments into its discourse, and how effective has this integration been in reshaping the public conversation about abortion?
- How has the pro-life movement utilized human rights language to frame its advocacy, and to what extent has this strategy reshaped the discourse and mobilisation on abortion?

This analytical framework will serve as a structuring methodological guide, enabling a rigorous examination of the evolution of strategies within Italian anti-abortion movements by organizing qualitative data along precise thematic axes: the conceptualization of abortion, strategies and modes of mobilization, and neocatolicism.

Then, to analyse my independent variable, the contextual and temporal factors influencing the mobilization of Italian anti-abortion movements, I will conduct a qualitative document analysis. The objective is to understand how the use of specific discourses, as well as the conceptualization of the lexical and mobilizing fields, contribute to shaping the evolving dynamics of transformation and redefinition of these actors and their strategies between 1978 and 2024.

I will examine an analytical corpus comprising one legislative text, four newspaper articles, one report, one referendum, and two speeches. In this second phase, in parallel with the analysis of interview data, the aim is to explore this methodological approach by employing specific interpretative discursive categories and frameworks. To this end, I will analyze both complete and fragmentary statements within the selected qualitative corpus, in constant dialogue with interview data and within the spatiotemporal framework of the study. This comparative process is an indispensable tool, reinforced with interview analysis, for achieving the analytical objectives of this research, allowing for an assessment of potential shifts in positions on abortion-related issues and the strategies that connect them.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

During the development of this chapter, it became both necessary and evident to address the ethical and moral considerations related to participant consent as well as the anonymization of actors and the information disclosed during the interviews. Before commencing the interviews, during the initial contact phase with potential participants, securing informed consent from all actors emerged as a priority. Participants were first informed about the research objectives and the reasons their participation was being sought. Consent to be interviewed and participate was obtained through a specifically designed consent form tailored for this purpose, included at the beginning of each interview transcription. Therefore, the anonymity of all interviewees, as well as the confidentiality of their testimonies, is a central aspect that I have sought to maintain throughout my empirical analysis.

4. Chapter 3: Governing the Womb – Legal Histories and Moral Contention in Italy

4.1. Opening Statement

Italian anti-abortion movements have been extensively studied by scholars over the past decades. Their distinctive operational features and strategic particularities make them a compelling case study, enriching both the existing literature and the understanding of the status and conditions of abortion in Italy.

A preliminary overview, supported by key figures on the state of abortion in Italy, is necessary to grasp the extent of the impact that Italian anti-abortion movement strategies exert on access to voluntary termination of pregnancy. These statistics are drawn from the December 2024 report by the Italian Ministry of Health, which examines the relationship between abortion in Italy and Law 194/1978 for the year 2022.

In 2022, 65,661 voluntary terminations of pregnancy (VTP) were recorded in Italy, marking an increase of 3.2% compared to 2021. The abortion rate, defined as the number of VTPs per 1,000 women aged 15 to 49 residing in Italy, stood at 5.6 per thousand in 2022. Among the women undergoing VTP, more than 92.9% were able to access the procedure within their region of residence. Moreover, for the first time in 2022, medical abortions surpassed surgical abortions, accounting for 52% compared to 46.6% of cases, respectively (Ministero della Salute, 2024, 5 December).

Regarding conscientious objectors, excluding insufficient data from the regions of Marche, Abruzzo, and Sicily, the Italian Ministry of Health reported that 92.6% of non-objecting gynaecologists working in authorized facilities prescribe abortion, whereas 7.4% do not. However, these figures warrant cautious interpretation, as conscientious objection exhibits significant regional disparities across Italy (Ministero della Salute, 2024, 5 December).

Furthermore, access to voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy remains profoundly unequal, primarily due to regional disparities in resource allocation and the prevalence of conscientious objection among practitioners. In addition to these inequalities, structural and ideological barriers, such as widespread conscientious objection, pressures from anti-abortion movements, mandatory counselling, and reflection periods, complicate the effective exercise of abortion rights.

4.2. The Italian context

4.2.1. *Legal and Political Background*

Abortion was legalized in Italy by Law 194/1978, also known as the "Norms on the Social Protection of Motherhood and the Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy." Article 1 of this law legally defines abortion as “the social protection of motherhood and the voluntary termination of pregnancy” (Art. 1, legge n°194/1978, translated from Italian). Abortion is thus understood within the framework of social protection of motherhood and is referred to in Italian as *Interruzione Volontaria della Gravidanza* (IVG). This conceptualization of voluntary termination of pregnancy reflects a historical genesis shaped by ideological, political, and religious orientations.

By the provisions of Law 194, voluntary termination of pregnancy is legally permitted in Italy under two clearly defined conditions. First, Article 4 stipulates that abortion may be performed “during the first 90 days of pregnancy, when the continuation of the pregnancy, birth, or motherhood could seriously endanger the [psychophysical] health of the woman, taking into account her health, economic, social, or family circumstances or the conditions under which conception occurred, or in the presence of foetal abnormalities” (Art. 4, legge n°194/1978). Second, Article 6 authorizes abortion beyond the 90-day limit under specific and exceptional circumstances: “when the pregnancy or birth poses a serious threat to the life of the woman or in the presence of significant foetal abnormalities that jeopardize the psychophysical health of the pregnant person” (Art. 6, legge n°194/1978). Finally, Article 7, paragraph 3, specifies that termination beyond this period may only occur “in the presence of a threat to the life of the pregnant person, and the physician performing the procedure must adopt every suitable measure to save the life of the fetus” (Art. 7, legge n°194/1978).

Articles 5 and 9 of the Italian law regulating voluntary termination of pregnancy establish precise regulatory limits on abortion practice. Article 5 imposes strict medical oversight of the procedure, including mandatory counselling and a compulsory seven-day reflection period between the request and the intervention. Article 9 legally introduces and regulates the concept of conscientious objection, allowing healthcare personnel and auxiliary staff to “refuse to participate in procedures referred to in Articles 5 and 7, as well as interventions aimed at terminating a pregnancy, if they declare conscientious objection in advance (...) Conscientious objection exempts healthcare personnel and auxiliary staff only from performing procedures and activities directly causing the termination of pregnancy” (Art. 9, legge n°194/1978). However, conscientious objection cannot be invoked when a medical intervention is indispensable to save the life of a woman in imminent danger.

The adoption of Law 194, the product of nearly seven years of negotiation (1971–1978), reflects the cultural and moral sensitivity of the issue within a society deeply imbued with Catholic values. This legislation exemplifies a delicate and subtle compromise between “individual rights and state oversight” (Autorino, Mattioli, and Mencarini, 2020). While the legal construction of abortion rights in Italy acknowledges the principle of abortion, it significantly constrains its practical effectiveness and accessibility. By instituting a series of binding procedures, such as mandatory counselling, reflection periods, and the allowance of conscientious objection by healthcare practitioners, Law 194 contributes to the institutionalization of a bureaucratic framework that can be deterrent. These constraints and obstacles may, in some cases, even when the woman’s health is at risk, hinder direct and safe access to voluntary termination of pregnancy.

Law 194, which decriminalized abortion, nevertheless represents a major historical advance for a country like Italy, situated within the so-called revolutionary continuum initiated by the legalization of divorce in 1970. It marks the starting point of a gradual process of secularization within Italian political institutions and medical spheres. However, this legislative turning point remains hindered by numerous obstacles that obstruct the effective and practical accessibility of voluntary termination of pregnancy (Autorino, Mattioli, and Mencarini, 2020).

Moreover, this law also marks the beginning of the genesis of the abortion debate in Italy. Law 194 laid the foundations for an increasing social and popular erosion and division, triggering a relentless ideological confrontation between two antagonistic conceptions of values, opinions, and societal visions. At the outset of this controversy, two opposing conceptualizations of abortion emerged: on one side, it was perceived as a crime punishable by imprisonment; on the other, as a symbol and lever of female emancipation.

The initial protagonists in this conflictual field primarily came from militant and political circles: on the one hand, radical groups such as the *Partito Radicale*; on the other, Catholic groups, including the Christian Democrats in collaboration with the *Movimento per la Vita* (Ozzano and Giorgi, 2015).

From that point onward, controversial reactions to the adoption of this new legislation were immediate. These reactions organized and coalesced into an innovative mobilization field aimed at dismantling the law. Some critics argued that “abortion is the only solution for a free woman, because women continue to be colonized by the patriarchal system (Valiente & Stetson, 2001).” Consequently, the 1981 referendum did not occur without reason: it pursued clear political and activist objectives. The referendum placed the very question of the legal existence of abortion firmly on the political and public agenda. This popular referendum sought to decide

between two opposing legislative proposals: repeal or liberalization of Law 194. It followed two legislative initiatives put forward by distinct groups with antagonistic understandings of abortion. On one side, the *Partito Radicale* proposed to eliminate certain restrictions within Law 194 to ensure freer access to voluntary termination of pregnancy. On the other hand, Catholic parties, supported by the *Movimento per la Vita Onlus*, defended the proposal for total repeal of the law based on the recognition of human life as sacred from conception. Both proposals were rejected by the Italian electorate. This democratic and legislative initiative failed in both camps. However, it did lead to the strengthening of medical infrastructures related to abortion (Ozzano and Giorgi, 2015).

Furthermore, this negative outcome galvanized the organizational spirit of both anti-abortion movements and so-called feminist or radical movements. Italian society began organizing simultaneously around the inclusion of feminist and gender agendas within Italian politics and in opposition to them, with the creation of new militant entities and political actors engaged on both sides. As a result, Italian society became polarized over abortion, torn between the right to access abortion and the right to life at conception. Abortion gradually emerged as a crucial issue in Italian society, a fundamentally moral and cultural battleground, politicizing the issue and dividing the nation. This polarization fostered new forms of organization to defend the convictions of each camp, leading to renewed debate by the late 1990s, following recurring challenges related to reproductive health and women's bodies (Ozzano and Giorgi, 2015). Notably, these included dynamics of marginalization such as conscientious objection, which in some regions reached rates as high as 80%, and regional financial barriers impeding abortion access.

4.2.2. The Role of Religion in Politics (Catholic Church's influence and secularization trends)

To understand the history of the field and the role of Italian anti-abortion social movements on issues related to gender and sexuality rights, it is essential to grasp the structuring role of religion within Italian society and politics, despite a gradual and increasing secularization. Italy is a historically Catholic territorial basin and self-defines as a religiously practicing nation (Giorgi, 2022). Currently, Catholicism in Italy is characterized as a “vicarious religion”, practiced by a minority but relevant to a majority, including non-religious citizens (Giorgi, 2022, pg 487). However, a foundation for secularization was laid with the adoption of the Lateran Pacts, “signed by Mussolini in 1929 to strip the Holy See of temporal power while granting the Catholic religion the status of official religion of the Italian state” (Praero, 2023,

pg 33). These agreements remain valid today and underpin the traditional cultural and moral imprint of the institutional presence of the dominant Catholic Church.

The centrality of Christian and Catholic values has been perpetuated through the culturalization of religion over the decades. This concept views religion as an identity marker: “a tradition in which people are born and raised, representing their ties to a territorial community rather than to a transnational community of faith (Giorgi, 2022, pg 490).” Consequently, the pervasiveness of religious norms in the Italian public sphere shapes the issue of abortion and the roles and functions assigned to anti-abortion actors. In Italy, religion plays a structuring and constitutive role, shaping the moral and cultural imagination around voluntary termination of pregnancy.

Secularization trends have intensified, prompting this spiritual authority, which prevails in political debates, institutional contexts, and medical practices surrounding abortion, to redefine the discursive framing and mobilization structures of these actors. Resorting to voluntary termination of pregnancy is linked to a new category of human rights related to gender, sexuality, and the condition of women, offering a novel interpretation of human rights: these are specific rights contingent upon social criteria to be enjoyed (Prearo, 2023). This emancipation is perceived as an anthropological threat to the moral and social order that the Church seeks to preserve.

In this perspective of theological renewal, the Italian Catholic Church seeks to assert itself as a normative and universal authority and institution capable of freely redefining and reconfiguring these new rights through the creation of a distinct theological vision. At the core of this commitment are the Italian Episcopal Conferences of 1997 and 2007, which play a fundamental role in legitimizing the ideological renewal and the associative and strategic recomposition inherent to these anti-abortion actors (Prearo, 2023). They respond to the profound crisis of Catholic faith and of the Catholic Church itself in Italy by introducing a new biblical and religious lexicon that establishes gender ideology as a legitimate framework for action, rooted in neo-Catholicism, aimed at preventing this growing emancipation from the moral and social order.

Thus, the right to abortion is reinterpreted through the lens of an ideological opposition to gender theory, perceived as a symptom of the increasing secularization of society. This reinterpretation aligns with a new neo-Catholic interpretive framework that claims a universal and transnational scope, aiming to redefine bioethical issues by invoking an intrinsic global moral dimension. The origins of this approach notably lie in the development of the *Progetto Culturale*, promoted by the Italian Church and influenced by the Holy See’s presence in Italy,

designed to revitalize social spaces, movements, and actors sharing so-called Catholic ethical and moral values (Prearo, 2023). This project seeks to reaffirm normative coherence in the face of secular modernity by erecting a new referential framework of collective convictions that restores meaning to this community. This framework rests upon “the defence of immutable values concerning life, family, bioethics, educational freedom, solidarity, and constraints to be placed on biomedical research (Prearo, 2023, pg 44).”

This process reveals a genuine overhaul of Catholic axiological foundations. This renewed will is reaffirmed through the implementation and deep embedding of organized political engagement, notably marked by the rise of anti-abortion movements alongside the growing influence of radical right-wing and far-right parties, which institutionalize and intrinsically politicize this issue. Finally, to conclude this section on the role of religion regarding abortion, conscientious objection can be understood as a kind of permanent and contemporary gateway for ethical and moral values opposed to this practice.

4.3. Defining the Italian Anti-abortion Movement

4.3.1. *A Social Movement perspective*

The Italian anti-abortion movements can be defined as countermovements. These actors inherently oppose the social progress achieved by society. They aim to uphold the status quo and maintain existing privileges by preventing, through all possible means and strategies, any change that contradicts their ideology (Mottl, 1980). It is important to use the term “anti-abortion movement” to emphasize and highlight that their primary objective is to dismantle and destroy a progressive gain, the liberalization of a contested and often neglected right, in this case, the right to abortion. An alternative designation for these social actors is the pro-life movement, which uniformly and collectively seeks to defend the essence of human life from conception. This semantic taxonomy, with its universal scope, equates life with fundamental opposition to death, represented by abortion and gender theory. This ideological axiology results from a socially constructed and contingently reinvented distortion of scientific findings, aimed solely at defending their ideals.

Moreover, this transformation can be observed by Paternotte (2013, pg 1) specifically across four dimensions: “(1) *a generational shift*; (2) *the modernization of discourses and strategies, often marked by a strong populist undertone*; (3) *the professionalization of activism*; and (4) *the transnationalization of activism*”.

Their emergence and re-emergence can thus be understood because of what Prearo (2023, p. 25) defines as “a result of the socio-economic, political, and cultural crises of liberal democracy.” The democratic crisis has encouraged and enabled a populist and radical right-

wing shift in moral and ethical values, particularly regarding abortion. In Italy, the existence and predominance of these movements are symptomatic of a form of mobilization supported by multiple sectors, structured along three key dimensions that consolidate their resonance in the public sphere: religious, activist, and political (Prearo, 2023).

Their repertoires of action manifest through both direct and indirect engagement with the public space: fluctuating support from the Catholic Church, events such as the March for Life, and the direct participation of political figures in these movements, including funding from conservative parties or involvement in their governing boards, thus legitimizing the moral validity of their actions. The political dimension offers a unique and strategic opportunity: the ability to directly influence the legislative framework of a contested issue with the support of favourable political authorities (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017).

The unification and transnationalization of their strategies and repertoires of action strengthen these actors, who operate continuously and multidimensionally to defend so-called "dignified" Western moral and ethical values, such as family and life (Lavizzari & Prearo, 2019). In other words, anti-abortion movements aspire to wage a continuous struggle against what they perceive as the end of Western human civilization, embodied by gender discourse and voluntary pregnancy termination (notably Law No. 194), which they view as dismantling the original order of a society based on the patriarchal and capitalist stability of the nuclear family.

The Italian anti-abortion mobilization demonstrates that this recent ideological reconfiguration is fundamentally and strategically driven, aiming to bring these issues back into the public debate. Initially, these actors were established around the defence and preservation of Catholic values grounded in a Christian worldview. This position inherently entails opposition to abortion legislation, in line with their religious convictions. However, temporal and contextual factors, such as secularization, have compelled Italian anti-abortion movements to reinvent themselves. This reinvention is anchored in shared objectives among these actors: "to block political, legal, or cultural reforms that promote the denaturalization of the sexual order, or to prevent such reforms from even being formulated (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017, pg 208)." The cultural and anthropological values of the Catholic countermovement have been reaffirmed through a new ideological identity: neocatholicism, mobilized to defend the "culture of life" against gender theory and ideology, which are symbolically equated with a "culture of death."

These actors are fundamentally opposed to female contraception, abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and surrogacy. This new neo-Catholic and anti-gender identity fuels the

emergence of new tools and strategies, which must be unified into a cohesive and robust movement to achieve their aims. This strategic heterogeneity is reflected in the innovative and growing presence of these actors across all spheres of society.

4.3.2. *Who Are the Main Actors?*

Historically, following the legalization of abortion in Italy, the genesis of Italian anti-abortion movements was primarily rooted in mobilization and actions directed under the moral and ethical guidance of the Holy See, in terms of discourse, means, and ideological vectors. The birth of anti-abortion movements in Italy truly began with the creation of the *Movimento Per la Vita Onlus (MpV)* in 1978. The establishment of this counter-social movement marked the resurgence of religious (moral and ethical) conservatism in Italy.

The *Movimento Per la Vita Onlus* is the central anti-abortion association, campaigning “against abortion and euthanasia, organized as a dense network of ‘Centres for Life’” (Prearo, 2023, p. 27). This actor aligns itself with the doctrinal orientations set forth by the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI), adhering to the cultural project of the Italian Catholic Church (1995) and the Vatican. Within the political spectrum, this religious resurgence has been notably supported by the Christian Democracy party, exemplified by former deputy Carlo Casini, who also served as president of the *Movimento Per la Vita Onlus* (Prearo, 2023).

It was in the early 2000s that the Italian anti-abortion movement took on a new dimension, particularly following the Catholic victory in the referendum on repealing Law No. 40 of 2004. This law “prohibited medically assisted procreation (MAP) using a donor external to a heterosexual married couple (Prearo, 2023, pg 51).” This so-called “Catholic legislation” remained in force due to the intense mobilization of Italian Catholic and conservative supporters opposing its repeal.

Moreover, the *Ecclesial Congress of Verona* in 2006, followed by the *Italian Episcopal Conference of 2007*, conferred dogmatic and doctrinal legitimacy upon Italian anti-abortion associations, notably through the publication of a review on “gender theory” by *Opus Dei* (Prearo, 2023). This ideological shift materialized through the structuring of a new anti-gender movement, culminating in the organization of the Family Day in May 2007. This mobilization aimed to oppose a draft law granting legal recognition to same-sex couples, representing what was perceived as the ultimate symbolic threat.

The Family Day marks the institutionalization of a collective and organized action to defend the family, understood in its natural and Christian sense. Furthermore, these actors no longer confine themselves to their original associative structures: they are now developing

parallel organizations, particularly legal entities, to formalize and institutionalize their renewed ideological and strategic momentum. This renewed focus centres on opposing gender ideology and initiating a bioethical shift, exemplified by the creation of *Scienza & Vita* (2005) as an extension of the *Movimento per la Vita Onlus* (Prearo, 2023).

The decisive turning point for Italian anti-abortion movements occurred between 2010 and 2016. This period represents a pivotal transformation in their internal structure, repertoires of action, and strategies, significantly expanding their spheres of influence. This long-lasting reorientation of their axiological and strategic semantics was consolidated by the involvement of external actors who naturalized this new direction, such as the formation of the *Unione Giuristi Cattolici Italiani*, the *Comitato Verità e Vita*, *Scienza & Vita* (led by Massimo Gandolfini), as well as pro-life historian Roberto de Mattei (Prearo, 2023).

This reconfiguration of the Italian Catholic field opposing abortion was launched through the *Marcia per la Vita* (*March for Life*) in 2011, following internal frictions within the *Movimento per la Vita*. The establishment of this March for Life in Rome inaugurated a new dynamic: this type of mobilization assumed the characteristics of a politically charged social action, engaging directly with major institutional actors (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017). It fostered increased visibility and public legitimacy for these rapidly expanding movements.

As a result, the emergence of two key actors marked a renewal in the landscape of Italian anti-abortion movements: *ProVita e Famiglia*, led by Toni Brandi, and *Giuristi per la Vita*, directed by Giuliano Amato, each marking a decisive step forward. Furthermore, the March for Life created a new space for contestation and mobilization of the anti-gender (and by extension anti-abortion) cause within Italian society. It embodies a “reaffirmation of a counter-discourse ‘against’; a bottom-up reappropriation of mobilization; an extra-ecclesiastical relocation of Catholic action within a post-Christian Democratic context” (Prearo, 2023, p. 81).

Consequently, in 2012, Toni Brandi founded *ProVita Onlus* (formerly *Notizie ProVita*, later renamed *ProVita e Famiglia*), marking a populist and media-driven turn. This transformation notably involved an expansion of thematic scope, broadening the public, media, and political resonance of anti-abortion agendas. This so-called pro-life association aligns with the conservative Catholic ideological matrix and articulates a new neo-Catholic dimension through its opposition to abortion and gender ideology (Lavizzari & Prearo, 2019). Alongside the *Movimento per la Vita*, it has become one of the two most influential actors in the fight against abortion in Italy.

In parallel with this large-scale mass mobilization, between 2012 and 2019, numerous pro-life congresses were regularly organized in conjunction with the annual *Marcia per la Vita*

(March for Life). These events primarily focused on the themes of abortion and gender ideology. These congresses proved to be central to the development of a new dynamic within the anti-gender and anti-abortion cause, bringing together actors who, despite differing political or associative affiliations, shared the same values and ideological orientation. They functioned as the epicentre of this new doctrinal movement, strengthening the fight against abortion across the country (Lavizzari & Prearo, 2019).

The coordination, organization, and national and transnational structuring of anti-abortion movements began to evolve with the transposition of the French *La Manif pour tous* model into *Manif pour tous Italia* in 2013. This marked a pivotal moment: it represented and illustrated the pre-political constitution of the anti-gender and anti-abortion cause in Italy. It also led to the emergence of key actors such as Jacopo Coghe (*Pro Vita e Famiglia*), Maria Rachele Ruiiu, and Filippo Savarese, as well as the formation of new anti-abortion associations such as *Giuristi per la Vita*, *Notizie ProVita* (linked to *ProVita Onlus*), and the *Comitato Difendiamo i Nostri Figli* (Prearo, 2023).

It was in the wake of major anti-abortion mobilizations between 2012 and 2013 that the association *Non Si Tocca la Famiglia* was founded, identifying as pro-life and as a defender of the family. It adopted an apolitical and non-confessional discourse, a typical feature of Italian neo-Catholic movements, centred on the protection of children and the natural family against gender ideology and abortion, both of which it inherently rejects and opposes.

Moreover, these new anti-gender and fundamentally anti-abortion associations now interact directly with the political sphere. Their influence is expressed both through their impact on the formulation of political and legislative agendas and through the organization of parallel mobilizations aimed at legitimizing the growing politicization of the abortion issue, and, by extension, the political actors promoting it. Abortion thus emerges as a matter of public concern, perceived as a potential threat to social stability in the absence of strong institutional responses (Garbagnoli & Prearo, 2017).

These political exchanges between movements and political parties are part of a deliberate strategy of ideological dissemination and infiltration, whereby so-called pro-life and pro-family themes gradually permeate decision-making spheres through actors who independently carry and promote these crucial issues tied to fundamental human rights. This phenomenon is particularly visible and intensifies during events such as the *Family Day* (2016) and the constitutional referendum of December 4, 2016, a pivotal moment that marks the political institutionalization of the Italian anti-abortion movement (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017).

It is within this context that *Il Popolo della Famiglia* ("The People of the Family") is founded by Mario Adinolfi, Nicola Di Matteo, and Gianfranco Amato. Unlike previous movements, this entity explicitly presents itself as a political actor, defending non-negotiable values such as the right to life. Abortion is denounced as an attack on the natural order and as a threat to the future of children, and consequently, to the future of Italian society itself.

In this dynamic of interweaving between the political and activist spheres, prominent figures from the Italian right actively participate in the mobilizations of anti-abortion movements, for example, Senator Carlo Giovanardi and MP Eugenia Roccella, both present at the *Family Day*, while emblematic leaders of these movements, such as Massimo Gandolfini, take part in political events, such as the 2019 gathering organized by *Fratelli d'Italia* and the *Lega* (Prearo, 2023). This party-movement exchange now enables the creation and legitimization of a dedicated space for the anti-gender and anti-abortion cause, directly affiliating with centre-right, right-wing, and far-right parties. These political parties ideologically and strategically align with the mobilizations and repertoires of action of the anti-abortion movements.

The 2019 *World Congress of Families (WCF)* held in Verona represents the most striking illustration of this phenomenon: this gathering of leading pro-life organizations enjoyed wide media coverage and significant political participation, confirming the neo-Catholic turn of anti-abortion movements, in which religion is instrumentalized for political purposes (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017). This process aims to legitimize a conservative agenda focused on denouncing gender ideology and promoting a form of identity-based populism, maintained by both anti-abortion actors and far-right political parties.

Within this framework, gender, abortion, and religion become symbolic and political tools of mobilization, serving clear strategic objectives supported by political parties advocating these ideologies: influencing legislation, or even repealing existing laws, in the name of so-called non-negotiable values. This is exemplified by Matteo Salvini's (Lega) speech in Verona at the WCF in 2019: "Long live the family, long live moms, long live dads, and children (...) good life ... and thank God" (Prearo, 2023, p. 153).

The legislature of Giorgia Meloni marks the beginning of an unprecedented alliance between political institutions and anti-abortion associations, including direct public funding and institutional legitimation. These actors are now authorized to intervene within hospital counselling centres, with the explicit aim of dissuading women from seeking an abortion.

However, the evolution of the Italian anti-abortion movements, both in terms of their ideological orientations and their strategic modes of action, no longer enjoys the explicit

support of the Holy See nor of the main historic Catholic organizations (Lavizzari & Prearo, 2019). These groups have expressed a clear desire to dissociate themselves from the new practices, voicing institutional disapproval. This distancing reveals a growing rift between the traditional ecclesiastical framework and contemporary forms of anti-abortion activism, highlighting a dynamic of autonomy within the movement, which must now confront both internal and external contestation.

4.3.3. *Ideological Identity and Values*

Ideology forms the foundational basis for the structure, organization, and culture of a social movement, grounded in the shared ideas, values, and moral principles that shape the movement's collective identity. In the Italian context, anti-abortion movements are rooted in, and simultaneously shaped by, a neo-Catholic configuration that finds its contemporary resonance in anti-gender ideology and the opposition to voluntary termination of pregnancy.

4.3.3.1. Neo-Catholicism

To define neo-Catholicism within the framework of this research, I rely on the approach developed by Prearo (2023), who conceptualizes this phenomenon as “the activist project developed by a galaxy of groups and associations with a Catholic matrix, which claim to speak from principles defending Catholicism, while proposing a form of activism that does not define itself as religious, to reintroduce a new Catholic political action in the era of secularization (Prearo, 2023, pg 19)”. The evolution of the strategies adopted by anti-abortion actors analysed in this study is fully embedded in this ideological matrix, of which they are both an expression and an extension. This reconfiguration manifests as a counteraction to the policies and theories of equality, gender, and sexuality, otherwise framed as "gender ideology."

This ideological shift brings with it two tactical characteristics. On one hand, these new anti-abortion movements are rooted in both the Catholic and political spheres, primarily the latter, by engaging in a “dynamic of outsourcing political work through religion” (Prearo, 2023, pg 20). On the other hand, their mobilizations operate at both national and transnational levels. This dual dimension of action unifies a so-called “natural” and “normative” resistance in the fight for human life around shared feelings of injustice, indignation, and moral urgency.

A decisive turning point emerged in 2012 with the *Marcia per la Vita* (2012), *La Manif pour Tous Italia* (2013), and *Family Day* (2016): three founding events that marked the renewal of the anti-abortion mobilization field in Italy. These events redefined the cultural identity of Italian anti-abortion actors and became the basis of their new collective impetus. In other words, their updated leitmotif, beyond pre-existing motivations, became the goal of “secularizing the

movement by de-Catholicizing it, to foster broader participation (...) structured around a mobilization experience (...) midway between faith testimony and political participation” (Prearo, 2023, pg 138 & 140).

In sum, neo-Catholic activism within Italian anti-abortion movements can be conceptualized around a threefold positioning, acting as a confirmation bias for their ideologies, actions, and strategies, across both emerging and established actors, characterized by extra-ecclesiastical, extra-Catholic, pre-political, and intra-political dimensions.

4.3.3.2. *Anti-Gender Ideology*

The fight against gender ideology constitutes the contemporary foundation of Italian anti-abortion movements, mobilizing in defence of the Human being or human ecology, in other words, actors defending the culture of life as opposed to the culture of death symbolized by abortion. This ideology emerged in the late 1990s as a reaction to the expansion of equality and SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) rights, notably developed during major international conferences such as the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994, and the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 (Ayoub and Stoeckl, 2024).

To define gender ideology within my research, I rely on the definition by Kuhar and Paternotte (2017, pg 5), who describe it as "resistance to the recognition or protection of abhorrent ethical and social reforms, namely sexual and reproductive rights, same-sex marriage and adoption, new reproductive technologies, gender, gender identity (...)". This interpretative framework is grounded in a conservative religious worldview that enables the reassertion of religion in the modern public sphere, positioning itself in opposition to sexuality and gender equality, which are perceived as contradictory to the biological complementarity of the sexes.

These anti-abortion actors protest "against gender in the name of an anthropological urgency," which not only allows Catholics to secularize their discourse but also enables far-right groups to neutralize the anti-democratic nature of their political project and legitimize their presence as credible interlocutors within the political arena. The Italian anti-abortion movements are thus situated within a broader spectrum of mobilizations, namely, the anti-gender movements, which advocate for non-negotiable societal values and visions, specifically "the promotion of the heterosexual marital couple as the basic cell of society and the family as the primary educational institution" (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017, pg 204).

This doctrinal orientation produces an essentialist, simplistic, and naturalistic vision of the issue of voluntary pregnancy termination in Italy. Such linguistic and semantic

simplifications facilitate the natural implantation of totalitarian ideas, such as fascism (Garbagnoli & Prearo, 2017). Gender ideology thereby becomes a symbolic bond uniting two camps publicly fighting a common enemy: the woman who undergoes abortion, representing a human culture of death, through a reorganization and reconceptualization of their strategies and modes of action.

4.3.4. *Strategies and Repertoires of Action*

By nature, the new anti-abortion movements have had to renew their strategies and modes of action due to a profound axiological restructuring of their ideology. The propaganda of fear, terror, and guilt is the primary innovative strategy employed by these actors to steer and control the issue of abortion in public opinion to their advantage. Their strategies and means of action rely on the art of manipulating consciences and public opinion, mobilizing language, collective imagination, and symbolism to strategically disseminate ideas and purported facts aimed at challenging the legality of abortion (Bernays, 2005).

This mechanism of ideological domination, employed by these specific actors, imposes an order of the world presented as natural, shaping a biased perception of reality and the scientific veracity of the medical practice of voluntary pregnancy termination (Bernays, 2005). This instrument seeks to polarize public opinion to achieve its political and social objectives of destroying and dismantling abortion rights, eliminating nuance, and imposing a binary choice: between good and evil, life and death.

The strategies of the anti-abortion movements involve controlling language to control thought and public opinion on this issue. The reduction of language allows the construction of a simplified reality conducive to designating a common enemy, abortion, blamed for destroying Italy's economic, social, and demographic prosperity.

4.3.4.1. Forms of Mobilization & Strategies

Hence, the repertoires of action and strategies of Italian anti-abortion movements are embedded within a transnational and European agenda, structured around the framework titled *Restoring the Natural Order: An Agenda for Europe*. This agenda, institutionalized around a shared objective, shapes public opinion and politicizes mobilizations; it seeks to challenge the existence of sexual and reproductive rights, particularly the right to abortion. These actors perceive themselves as entrusted with a transcendent mission: to restore a natural order grounded in a sacred conception of human dignity, thereby delegitimizing any recourse to voluntary termination of pregnancy. This agenda provides Italian anti-abortion actors with a structured strategic framework articulated around four main lines of action: (1) “use the

weapons of our opponents and turn them against them”; (2) “like our opponents, frame our issues in terms of rights”; (3) “malign opponents and non-conducive institutions”; and (4) “become a respected interlocutor at the international level (European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development, 2018)”.

At the national level, Italian anti-abortion actors adapt transnational strategies to the specificities of the Italian context. The strategic modes of action employed by these movements revolve around two structuring dynamics: on the one hand, *contamination*, the infiltration of institutional and state normative frameworks. For example, the French *Manif pour Tous* movement was “contaminated” into Italy through *Manif pour Tous Italia*, the 2019 Verona Congress, and its resonance during the 2019 European elections; on the other hand, *contagion*, the diffusion of referential frameworks into the public sphere, as exemplified by Vatican encyclopaedic dictionaries (Prearo, 2023). More recently, these actors have developed three strategic functions to intensify their influence in the political arena: the irrigation function (shaping ideological currents through thematic congresses designed to integrate their discourse into public debate and anti-gender committees); the identity function (maintaining doctrinal coherence, as exemplified by the Family Day events); and the programming function (steering the political agenda, notably through figures such as Massimo Gandolfini) (Prearo, 2023). These repertoires of action and strategies aim to abolish and obstruct the accessibility and practicability of Law No. 194/1978.

The ideological and strategic alliance with populist and far-right political forces has normalized anti-abortion discourse and mobilizations, constructing a securitization logic in which abortion is framed as a collective threat to be eradicated.

This dynamic of voluntary restrictions and the creation of obstacles to access voluntary termination of pregnancy forms part of a broader historical mobilization process, which I have analysed in the section dedicated to key anti-abortion actors. Across three temporal sequences, from the 1970s through to the 2020s, these movements have progressively structured their actions and strategies: from the 1981 referendum seeking the repeal of Law No. 194, to *Manif pour Tous Italia* (2013), the national and local Family Days (2016), the International Family Congress in Verona (2019), and the rise of the Meloni legislature marked by the adoption of the PRRR decree affecting these actors. These events illustrate the evolving foundation of anti-abortion movement strategies within the political field and public sphere, contributing to the normalization of reproductive rights regression, particularly abortion, in Italy (Garbagnoli & Prearo, 2017). One final, and by no means insignificant, strategy is the staging of foetal funerals designed to induce guilt and stigmatize women who have undergone abortion.

The distinctiveness of Italian anti-abortion movement strategies lies in their evolution from a crusade primarily grounded in traditional religious rhetoric, anchored in the defence of Christian values and biblical references, towards a more complex and politicized stance. These movements now position themselves explicitly in opposition to what they label as “gender ideology” (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017). Their activities span both the public sphere and social media platforms, where they disseminate distorted content that contradicts established scientific facts about abortion, such as the claim that a foetus’s heart begins beating at conception.

Moreover, this dynamic is compounded by an institutional, political, and medical bureaucracy that actively obstructs effective access to voluntary termination of pregnancy. This is evidenced by the lack of centralized, clear, and accessible information regarding the practical modalities of abortion, that is, where, how, and through which practitioners it can be safely carried out. Additionally, the recurrent appointment of Catholic doctors or gynaecologists, often conscientious objectors, to lead public hospitals exacerbates this situation. In this context, refusing to invoke conscientious objection in Italy amounts to an act of near-heroic resistance.

The totality of these institutional, legal, and medical barriers constitutes a contemporary legal lobby whose underlying objective is to restrict access to a medical practice that is nonetheless protected by law. Although abortion is legally permitted, the bodies of women seeking abortion are effectively confiscated, subjected to constraints imposed and enforced by others on their behalf. Everything appears orchestrated to make access to voluntary termination of pregnancy increasingly difficult, a deliberate and systematic strategy. This strategy is also underpinned by discursive frameworks, transnational networks, and a collective identity that is mobilized and sustained by the anti-abortion movements themselves (Roggeband, 2007).

4.3.4.2. Discursive Frameworks and Framing

The explicit use of terms such as “abortion” or “voluntary termination of pregnancy” contributes to making the phenomenon visible: to name is to make exist. In this regard, language becomes a central political issue. Persisting in clearly designating these realities constitutes an act of resistance against the symbolic, social, and political control strategies deployed by Italian anti-abortion movements. Refusing lexical erasure is also a refusal to marginalize the right to abortion (Lamoureux, 2021).

Hence, the primary moral, cultural, and ethical controversies surrounding abortion rest on a deliberate and determined construction of discursive frames that conceptualize this medical practice as a problematic issue, a matter of public concern that demands action and decision-making. These frames serve as one of the key tools employed by Italian anti-abortion

movements to justify their mobilization and the deployment of their strategies (Satheesh & Benford, 2007). The disputes surrounding voluntary termination of pregnancy crystallize into a fundamental and intrinsic opposition between conflicting values and two divergent visions and apprehensions of modern society.

Voluntary termination of pregnancy raises profound ethical and moral questions concerning fundamental societal debates about the status of the embryo, the beginning and end of life, and the right to bodily self-determination.

a. Core Frames and Narratives

In Italy, anti-abortion movements employ four types of discursive frames to structure and underpin their strategies of action, mobilization, and domination. The first two discursive frames outlined below are historical framings traditionally used to characterize abortion.

Firstly, the primary structuring narrative mobilized by these movements' centres on the issue of the foetus's right to life within the woman's body. This discursive frame confers a transcendent dimension to the matter: it becomes moralizing and universal. The concept of the right to life is grounded in the notion of a "culture of life," which, while often deliberately vague, sacralises existence from the moment of conception. Intrauterine life is thus portrayed as the product of a divine will, immutable, and pregnancy as the ultimate blessing of a woman's natural vocation. From this perspective, the embryo is consistently designated as a "child," irrespective of scientific or medical criteria, revealing a deliberate conflation of ignorance, conflation, and scientific truth (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017).

This essentialization of motherhood elevates procreation to the ontological purpose of the woman, reducing her identity and bodily determinism to her reproductive capacity. Consequently, the right to life is represented and institutionalized as a fundamental human right, thereby rendering women's reproductive rights invisible and illegitimate. Furthermore, this discourse, deployed by anti-abortion movements, is embedded in a traditionalist, naturalist, and normative rhetoric; it legitimizes the conceptualization of abortion as a murderous and unjust act (Lamoureux, 2021).

This medical practice, though legal, is framed as an assault on innocent life, the life of a foetus who, having asked for nothing, is deprived of its fundamental right to exist. The foetus is conceptualized as a human person endowed with political, civic, and legal rights. This "common-sense" discursive frame is reinforced by precise language, such as "unborn children," "innocent life," or the "figure of the child to be protected" (Lamoureux, 2021). It is accompanied by strong vocabulary, including terms like "foeticide" or "neonatal infanticide,"

and relies on truncated medical imagery and videos. The heartbeat becomes a central symbol opposing voluntary termination of pregnancy: indisputable proof of human life within the woman's womb.

Secondly, within each of the discursive frames employed by Italian anti-abortion movements, voluntary termination of pregnancy is systematically and intrinsically conceptualized as "a crime, an immoral and shameful act, a deliberate and provoked murder (Lamoureux, 2021, pg 84)." Consequently, the freedom to choose cannot be legitimately recognized here: it is perceived as a direct danger and threat to an innocent life that will be extinguished through unconsciousness or indifference to the moral consequences of the act. The woman seeking to undergo an abortion thereby transgresses a dual norm: the moral order imposed by these movements and the identity norm of femininity, a sacralised component of her social and reproductive role. Motherhood is mythologized as an essential vocation and a pure gift of life, one that must be honoured. Abortion remains illegal as it contravenes a transcendent natural divine law, thereby disqualifying any claim to bodily autonomy (Lamoureux, 2021). This essentialist conceptualization of woman reduces her to a figure defined by her capacity to bear children, subjected to perpetual surveillance in the name of a superior moral and ethical order imposed on all.

Thirdly, the evolution of Italian anti-abortion movements is also evident in the modernization of their discursive frames and communication strategies. Society becomes the stage for a confrontation between two irreconcilable visions: the culture of life (advocated by anti-abortion movements) and the culture of death (promoted by contemporary movements and defenders of reproductive rights). This dualism pits moral conservatism against a biopolitical approach to reproductive rights and mobilizes new actors, including the state and individuals, in the redefinition of these moral and ethical norms. Within this binary framework of reality, any possibility of dialogue or compromise is excluded in favour of a confrontational logic. This cleavage opposes theology to science, religious morality to political ethics, and sexual and reproductive health (Garbagnoli & Prearo, 2017).

The culture of life is grounded in a naturalist theology, legitimized by a pseudo-scientific "truth," which upholds the natural complementarity of biological sexes and the centrality of the (heterosexual) nuclear family as the social norm. It aims to renaturalize social relations by reassigning individuals to biologically immutable predefined roles.

Fourthly, in contrast, the culture of death is embodied by feminist currents and progressive dynamics, driven by the liberalization of abortion and the emergence of gender-related issues. This is perceived as an existential threat to the moral and ethical order,

precipitating Western societies into societal decadence, exemplified by sexual education and awareness in schools (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017). Naming abortion and topics related to sexual and reproductive rights as gender issues inherently grants them discursive, political, and public legitimacy, something the anti-abortion movements actively seek to counter.

This binary understanding of the medical practice, pitting a virtuous “us” against a threatening “them”, fuels growing social polarization, justifying and amplifying the rise of populist discourse. This discursive framing presents itself as simplistic, rational, and universal. It claims to be “non-homophobic, scientific, anthropological, feminist, naturalist, humanist, and ecological” to mask its conservative foundations. This rhetoric aims to reaffirm the defence of non-negotiable values championed by these movements, constructing their national and transnational legitimacy.

5. Chapter 4: Empirical Analysis and Findings – The Italian Anti-Abortion Movement and Its Evolving Strategies

The empirical analysis of this paper is articulated around my three hypotheses. First, I want to analyse the salience evolution of the anti-abortion actors' strategies and then look if there is a tendency towards generalization of those strategies to contemporary political Italy. Secondly, I will present the evolution of the anti-abortion actors and their discursive framing from the catholic morality and the sacredness of life to the anti-gender ideology and the populist neocatholicism.

5.1. Abortion in Italy

In Italy, the issue of abortion has, since its legalization, profoundly shaken society, mobilizing both religious and political spheres. In recent years, this question has undergone a significant reconfiguration: it has been politically and symbolically reinvested, becoming the stage for an increasingly acute ideological polarization, seized upon by professionalized and institutionalized anti-abortion movements.

Law 194 primarily addresses a legal vacuum regarding the regulation of voluntary termination of pregnancy, closely following the recommendations of the Italian Constitutional Court. This law authorizes recourse to voluntary abortion only under specific conditions, namely when the woman's life or her physical or mental health is at risk. A contextual clarification is necessary: according to one of the interviewees, Law 194 embodies a compromise between the Italian State's progressive aspirations and the Catholic religion, « *the laws of the 1970s were also made with an acceptance by the Christian democracy of a series of principles of action in the constitution. The Christian democracy was not in agreement at the time, as it was not for all the laws on divorce and so on (I11, 2025)* ».

Among the actors interviewed, the definition of Law 194 legalizing abortion emerges as rather contested. Two opposing interpretations prevail and stand in confrontation with one another. Despite its legal adoption, it remains a battlefield, a cultural and moral war.

On the one hand, some of the interviewees conceptualize Law 194 as a fundamental and pioneering piece of legislation, one that ought to be applied as broadly as possible to regulate reproductive rights, such as voluntary termination of pregnancy, within Italian society. In this view, the law makes it possible to extend this right and its exercise to the greatest number of people, rendering them equal before it. This law is deemed necessary; it represents a historic milestone for a Catholic and conservative Italy, where nothing of the sort had existed before. It

thus constitutes a first step toward legally securing and regulating the practice of this medical procedure.

On the other hand, it is important to underline that Law 194 of 1978 stems from an earlier conceptualization, since even within the very wording of its title it reflects the structures and institutions of a patriarchal society, one belonging to, or at least giving the impression of belonging to, the past: namely, the defence of motherhood as a natural and meaningful phenomenon. This demonstrates that the original intent behind the legislation was not to confer a right to abortion, but rather to regulate certain aspects of motherhood, protecting it and affirming women's health solely through the lens of maternity.

Moreover, for some, this demonstrates and underlines that Law 194 contains within itself a logic of dissuasion, not including recourse to the woman's own thought and decisive bodily power. Then, some emphasize the very paradox of needing a law to legislate on a simple medical practice, proven and demonstrated by science, since over time this older definition has been confronted with a new one, namely recourse to voluntary termination of pregnancy as a choice, more than a choice, a medical practice, a vital health need, giving rise to the new ideology of bodily autonomy, as underlined in the following excerpt: « *we can't ignore the fact that we are talking about a health issue, where reproductive health also includes the possibility of self-determination (15, 2025)* ». Despite the adoption of this law, the reality of this medical practice in hospitals is quite different, since Article 9 on conscientious objection has, from the outset, constituted a major obstacle to its implementation. Nuances can be added, as one of the interviewees points out, noting that Law 194 originally stems from a ruling of the Italian Constitutional Court. This conceptualization of Law 194 aligns with a humanist, committed, and feminist understanding. It is, in sum, the only safeguard enabling the exercise of this right.

Finally, this type of actor, who can be categorized as feminist, acknowledges that the current status of abortion and recourse to voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy primarily results from the poor practical application of Law 194: a lack of uniform, nationwide information, and various obstacles such as mandatory reflection periods or the physician's certification required to legally access this medical practice.

On the other hand, some actors demonstrate that Law 194 does not, in any case, mention “*voluntary termination of pregnancy (IVG)*,” except in the title. Law 194 is configured solely as a “*legislative norm for the social protection of maternity (Legge n. 194 del 22 maggio 1978, Art 1)*.” Moreover, the first paragraph of Article 1 confirms this normative dimension.

Other interviewees understand Law 194 as a feminist law, in other words, an euphemism. Law 194 cannot be recognized as a law granting women the right to abortion. In this view, it is

rather based on the protection of women's health and reflects an injunction toward birth. Abortion is defined as a persistent crime contributing to the demographic destruction of Italian society: it is the killing, the murder, of a human being. The woman cannot decide for her own body since this so-called medical practice is therefore seen as illegal and criminal, as it kills another being. Law 194 thus grants the right to kill this human being, even if it is sick. Within this understanding, voluntary termination of pregnancy cannot be established as a medical practice. It is understood as a form of contraception that endangers the life of the child in gestation, rendering abortion something ordinary and summary.

Consequently, some of the interviewees take cases and personal experiences to describe their truth and deconstruct the scientific facts regarding the reality of women and this medical practice, such as, for example, extreme cases of 14- and 15-year-old girls resorting to abortion as a form of contraception. Motherhood is perceived negatively, gravely neglecting the essence and reality of life and its conception.

Furthermore, to demonstrate that Law 194 does not address Italy's societal problems, some actors point out that this law relieves men of responsibility in the face of motherhood and offers women no alternative to voluntary termination of pregnancy. These actors show that, because of a lack of support, often in situations of abandonment or solitude, these women, in despair and lacking hope, decide to resort to voluntary termination of pregnancy.

From this perspective, recourse to voluntary termination of pregnancy would have significant impacts on women's lives and their right to happiness. Indeed, if some women resort to voluntary termination of pregnancy and deliberately and voluntarily lose a unique and irreplaceable human being, they will subsequently experience incurable remorse, causing eternal pain.

According to this type of interviewee, women who have had abortions ultimately all regret this action, carrying it as a deep wound and a curse. That is why not resorting to voluntary termination of pregnancy is considered simpler and less painful, since both the woman and the child she carries will then be accompanied and supported. Law 194 has, in fact, diminished the valorisation of fragile life and the number of births in Italy. It introduces the idea that birth is a good available, like an object, at the disposal of adult choice.

This conception rejects the humanist understanding of voluntary termination of pregnancy, which integrates and creates new rights; in this view, voluntary termination of pregnancy is a private right. Consequently, abortion is presented as a false and contrary medical practice, a social stigma, something shameful, humiliating, and disturbing both for the person undergoing it, for their surroundings, and for Italian culture and society in the context of a progressively

frozen demographic: it is an aversion to phallogentric male power and essentialist misogyny, which understands the woman exclusively as a biological reproduction object, a menstruating reproductive matrix.

Abortion becomes more than an oppression of minorities; voluntary termination of pregnancy transforms into an instrument of intimidation wielded by those who are economically, socially, and politically privileged, abusing their status and position of power by naturally repudiating this medical practice under the weight of deafening silence, sustaining the taboo of not stepping out of the prescribed role by becoming an aborted woman whose voice will be deliberately ignored, crystallizing solitude, misunderstanding, and uncertainty. Resorting to voluntary termination of pregnancy stems from despair and ultimate selfishness; in other words, *“abortion has become the immediate and predominant response, without real support in the choice and without actual recognition of alternative solutions (I15, 2025) »*. These conceptualizations of voluntary termination of pregnancy are rooted both in the religious doctrines of Catholicism and in the integration of gender theory. However, one interviewee sought to nuance the position of the Catholic Church on voluntary termination of pregnancy; according to this person, their use of the Bible is erroneous and inaccurate, as illustrated in the following excerpt: *« the pro-life movement has used the bible and religious language to defend whatever they believe in, it's just a rhetoric, it's not real. It has been useful (I8, 2025) »*.

Ultimately, its adoption provoked intense public and political debates, demonstrating a deep division within Italian society on this issue, as evidenced by the two interpretations mentioned above. Despite the opposition, the norms and recommendations of the Constitutional Court prevailed, namely that the protection of the life of the unborn (not considered a legal subject under the Italian Constitution) cannot be recognized as outweighing the life and health of the woman, which is recognized by the Italian Constitution.

The central question of Law 194 goes beyond merely authorizing a woman whose health is at risk to resort to voluntary termination of pregnancy. Law 194 is fundamentally unsettling because it raises the ethical, moral, and philosophical question of what constitutes a legal subject under Italian law, prompting anti-abortion movements to rethink and redesign their strategies, since the principle of a legal subject is a constitutional principle that cannot be prohibited or abolished. Indeed, *« the question of the interruption of you will to live is that it is inserted inside a possible society to think the values that are different from those that have decided to die, because going against the 194 means going against the Constitution (...) because there are constitutional principles, then if you go against them that consequently does not go with the Republic itself (I11, 2025) »*. Moreover, the law shapes culture; it changes the

way people think, and thus the cultural perception of a practice or behavior. Law 194, as this legislative instrument, produces a change in values and mores within Italian society. However, titled “protection of maternity,” it authorizes voluntary termination of pregnancy only partially, and only under specific conditions.

Thus, being outraged by a law legalizing abortion amounts to maintaining and supporting a form of systemic sexism and misogyny, which is equally condemnable. This conception of voluntary termination of pregnancy reinforces the mechanisms of oppression, discrimination, and stigmatization of this systemic phenomenon, supported by history, culture, and political institutions. The whole of Italy still trembles today when the question of voluntary termination of pregnancy is raised. Abortion continues to be a cultural war dividing the entirety of Italy.

Consequently, in Italy, voluntary termination of pregnancy poses a question that divides society into two parts, « *the idea of what kind of society we want, not only in defence of the existing, but what kind of society we want to continue to build, to think, to imagine, because what is being done is probably also the ability to imagine a new society where people are protected on one side and free on the other (I11, 2025)* ». This point is the underlying reflection of this most important societal issue. Ultimately, this is what this question primarily and fundamentally raises, forming two antagonistic camps, the pro-life and the pro-choice, dividing Italian society in every respect, more than ever disunited on this matter.

Throughout this empirical analysis, I have chosen to define the pro-life movements as anti-abortion actors. The term “anti-abortion” is crucial, since the introduction of the term pro-life was gradually constructed over time through the evolution of these actors’ strategies, notably through the adoption of gender ideology: « *it’s crazy that people think, religions have always been against abortion. That’s not the truth, this is just wrong and not the case (I8, 2025)* ».

5.2. Strategic Evolution of Italian Anti-Abortion Movements

I will begin my empirical analysis by examining for first and third hypotheses. My first hypothesis is that the development of new strategies and new repertoires of action, including both interaction with political and legal power while still aligning with more traditional and historical forms of mobilization, corresponds to an increase in the professionalization and institutionalization of these anti-abortion actors. Concerning the third one, it specifies that this turning point occurs through neo-Catholicism strategies and an anti-gender discursive framework. My empirical analysis highlights this change, which seems to have begun to manifest as early as the **Italian Episcopal Conferences of 1997 and 2007**, with the creation of

a new wave of anti-abortion social movements, such as, for example, *NonSiToccaLaFamiglia*, mobilized through new forms of action and ideological bias.

The real strategic turning point seems to have occurred during the period from 2010 to 2016, notably with the **World Congress of Families (2016) in Verona and the March for Life (2015)**. Furthermore, the evident professionalization and institutionalization of these four anti-abortion actors were reinforced with the arrival of **Giorgia Meloni** as the first female Prime Minister of Italy in 2022, who openly provided her budgetary and cultural support, facilitating the flourishing of these actors' strategies.

Moreover, I will first analyse this transformation within the two historical Italian anti-abortion movements, *ProVita e Famiglia* and *Movimento Per la Famiglia Onlus (MpV)*. Subsequently, as their strategies evolved, I will integrate *NonSiToccaLaFamiglia* and *Il Popolo Della Famiglia* to demonstrate the culmination of the bureaucratization of these Italian anti-abortion actors.

Consequently, recognizing and conceiving the existence of strategies employed by Italian anti-abortion movements and actors is, for some interviewees, unnecessary, ultimately a natural act of action and engagement for the preservation of a better future; for others, it is obvious and essential to express indignation to promote and consolidate the networks of anti-abortion actors. Strategies bring together and shape the social body of anti-abortion movements, where ideas of collective action emerge and action plans are born. These strategies aim to problematize voluntary termination of pregnancy in the public and political sphere.

In the scientific literature, I relied notably on the definitions of Tilly and Mottle (1980) to conceptualize the strategies of anti-abortion movements. Before empirically analysing each of these strategies, I will first draw upon the report *Restoring the Natural Order* (2018) (EPF) as well as an excerpt from one of the interviews, concerning this theme of strategies. This will allow the historical and contemporary context of the use of strategies by Italian anti-abortion movements to be established.

This excerpt from one of the interviews hypothetically illustrates the hidden and clandestine strategic functioning of the repertoires of action of Italian anti-abortion actors. According to this excerpt, there will be three levels of action and strategies: (1) local, (2) international, (3) integration with Italian institutions.

At the local level (1), these strategies are expressed through direct and spontaneous actions, yet planned, such as « *they occupy the space, in front of the polyclinic, for, in theory, the 40 days of Lent, so 40 days before Easter (...) to pray for the end of the abortion, with a poster (I4, 2025)* ». This has also been repeated over several years, as well as in November. This

degree of involvement directly exposes and imposes issues that transform into political debates, requiring swift resolution by local authorities. These actions are more than mere demonstrations of disagreement; they leave a mark on the minds and lives of the community, placing voluntary termination of pregnancy at the centre of it. Moreover, these actions are imbued with meaning and impact, since they represent only the visible part of this battle to preserve and save the life of a child. Indeed, this mobilization constitutes the local and Italian anchor point of an international anti-abortion association and movement.

At the global level (2), the international sphere is characterized by cohesion and coordination of mobilizations and repertoires of action by these anti-abortion actors, whether through ephemeral protests in front of hospitals, communication campaigns by « *represented children with a bar code on their faces (...) as if to say that children are not a commodity to be sold (I4, 2025)* ». This second level of engagement generates a more harmonious and unified impact. It becomes the backdrop and driving force of solidarity for these actions, becoming instinctive through mutual adherence to this struggle, constructed by the integration and social bonds connecting these anti-abortion actors transnationally.

Finally (3), integration with institutions constitutes the third level of mobilization. This level is fundamental and decisive: it demonstrates that political and institutional power can be brought to fund, interact with, and directly engage these actors, notably due to their political, moral, or ethical convictions. This strong involvement and interaction represent the most dangerous threshold. This level possesses the skill and capacity to « *the power to change the laws, to make public initiatives, to use public funds to do things with a lot of influence and a lot of money (I4, 2025)* ». This fusion of the anti-abortion movement sphere and Italian political power was recently highlighted by the investigation conducted by the newspaper *Domani*, concerning the **ProVita** movement and the far-right Italian political party **Forza Nuova**. I will focus on analysing this pivotal investigation in the professionalization and institutionalization section of my empirical analysis. These three tiers of mobilization and action strategies produce different repercussions, each with its own degree of intensity and danger.

Indeed, this is also highlighted in the report *Restoring the Natural Order* (2018). This report is crucial for modelling the strategies of anti-abortion actors and the novelty of their mobilization at the European level. To this end, the investigation examines Agenda Europe (the blog and the annual summits), created in 2013, which is an informal online and in-person network, the structure and body inspired by Christianity, serving as a European hub for more than one hundred associations, activists, political figures, and anti-gender and anti-abortion think tanks from over thirty different European countries. More fundamentally, it opposes all

issues encompassing “*sexual and reproductive rights (SRR)*.” Members meet annually and behind closed doors to align collectively on mobilizations to be undertaken nationally and transnationally, unified around the concept of restoring the “Natural Law,” and interacting regularly with political power, such as Rocco Buttiglione. It establishes four main strategies derived from Agenda Europe: « *(1) use the weapons of our opponents and turn them against them; (2) like our opponents, frame our issues in terms of rights; (3) malign opponents and non-conducive institutions; (4) become a respected interlocutor at the international level (EPF, 2018)*”. In addition to these clearly established strategies of this network of actors, Agenda Europe has a precise and directive plan, initially based on the dogma of the Vatican and Christianity: their goal is to « *overturning existing laws on basic human rights related to sexuality and reproduction (EPF, 2018, pg 3)* » by using the strategies cited above, but also relying on the emerging context of European ultra-conservatism and populism regarding societal views on reproductive health issues, promoting the model of the traditional European family.

Consequently, the four Italian anti-abortion movements studied in this research are initially based on the first generic model presented by one of the interviewees. Subsequently, over time and at key turning points in the evolution of their strategies, they each drew inspiration from the advent and the strategic and dogmatic European support provided by this innovative arrival of Agenda Europe in the field of anti-abortion activism in Europe, aiming to apply and tactically disseminate it across Italian territory.

In the next three subsections, I will examine the evolution of the strategies of the four Italian anti-abortion actors I have chosen to study, specifically *ProVita e Famiglia*, *Movimento per la Vita Onlus*, *NonSiToccaLaFamiglia*, and *Il Popolo Della Famiglia*, over the past decades, to empirically observe the emergence of a transition toward calculated mobilization strategies.

These four key Italian actors do not agree on the existence of strategies; for some of the interviewees, it would be reductive to frame their approach as strategic, insofar as their mobilizations are rooted in a natural dynamic of action rather than a planned one. For others, however, they do indeed acknowledge the use of these repertoires of action to achieve their intended and pursued objectives.

Thus, within the group of sixteen interviewees, there is not, at the outset, any clear consensus regarding the existence or non-existence of homogeneity among Italian anti-abortion movements and their strategies. The question of the structuring of this field, as well as that of

the repertoires of action adopted by these movements during this period of initial construction, will be examined in the following subsections.

5.2.1. *From Moral Protest to Political Lobbying (1970s-1980s)*

This subsection will analyse the original strategies of the historical Italian anti-abortion movement, illustrated through the case study of *Movimento per la Vita Onlus (MpV)*, the only actor recognized as mobilizing against abortion during that period. Founded in 1971 by Carlo Casini, an Italian lawyer and politician, the movement benefited from Casini's ambiguous dual status as both a member of the European Parliament and an Italian politician. Through this position, he not only initiated the professionalization of anti-abortion movement strategies but also laid the groundwork for a sustained and ongoing interaction with political power.

The structure of this anti-abortion movement was organized around several pillars: the helpline *SOS Vita*, initiated by Giuseppe Garrone; the women's crisis centres (*Centri di Aiuto alla Vita*, CAVs); and finally, the philanthropic *Fondazione Vita Nova*, created by Domenico Migliori to support its doctrine and legitimize the public expression of this movement through various initiatives and awareness campaigns. This organizational structure contributed to the diffusion of *MpV*'s strategies. The movement thus opened the way for the introduction of the anti-abortion cause into the Italian public sphere. This opening naturally facilitated both support for and the implementation of these strategies within the Italian context.

Accordingly, *MpV*'s strategies are situated within the context of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the adoption of Law 194 initiated, in their view, the creation of a culture of abortion normalized and trivialized into a socially accepted practice, a mere instrument of fertility regulation. Moreover, this legislation, according to some, erected « *an artificial and forced opposition between the protection of unborn life and the woman's right to choose whether to continue the pregnancy or terminate it (I15, 2025)* ». The theory of liberal and autonomous choice over one's own body does not exist within this vision, since for it, only the control of bodies by the State prevails and endures. The 1970s remain, for some of the interviewees, the beginning of the « *process of deconstruction of the family that started in 1968. The year 1968 marked the beginning of a cultural and sexual revolution (...) with the illegitimate crime of adultery, (...) the law on divorce in 1970, and in 1978, we have the law 194 (I7, 2025)* ».

Thus, it was within a climate of fragmentation of the public and political sphere regarding the adoption of Law 194 on voluntary termination of pregnancy that the 1981 referendum took place, aiming to decide either on the extension of the time limits or on the

abolition of Law 194, proposals emanating from opposing parties. For the **MpV**, this referendum allowed them, according to one of the interviewees, to recognize the existence of a societal foundation adhering to the principles and values defended by this anti-abortion movement, as illustrated by the following excerpt: « *In the 1980s, a confrontational approach was chosen against Law 194, materializing in the abrogative referendum of May 17, 1981, promoted by the Movement for Life. That day is often remembered only for the defeat of the question proposed by MpV, which nonetheless garnered over ten million votes in favour of the repeal of abortion. On that same day, a question proposed by the panellists was also voted on, aiming to remove the limit to the twelfth week, effectively allowing abortion without limits. That question, however, was rejected by over twenty-seven million opposing votes (...). The pro-life movement was thus able to benefit from a result that demonstrated considerable popular support for the anti-abortion idea (12, 2025)* ». This marks the beginning and initiation of the process of elaborating the strategies of the **MpV**, and more broadly, of the mobilizations of Italian anti-abortion actors. This constitutes the first foundational pillar in the formation of anti-abortion movements as political lobbyists, now intruding into matters belonging to the private and intimate sphere, and transposing them into the public and democratic domain.

However, this momentum of support for these actors did not last, due to the broader context of the liberalization of Western societies, marked by the various waves of feminism and scientific advances in contraception. They reinvented themselves operationally, notably through the establishment of 400 Life Listening Centres (*Centri di Ascolto per la Vita*, CAV), composed of volunteers, across the Italian territory in 1975. This supplementary strategy is pivotal for the structured and strategic organization of this anti-abortion actor. These centres constitute the local and physical anchor points of the **MpV**, ensuring the effectiveness and productivity of their strategies on individuals and their decisions through the mobilization of misinformation or the withholding of information, with their political action grounded in a theological doctrine. As such, this site presents itself as a space of reception and support for mothers within these *Centri di Aiuto alla Vita* (CAV), as illustrated in the following passage « *the Movement for Life, which tried to welcome these people, mothers and so on, with some silent work (17, 2025)* »; in others words « *it focused its efforts on providing concrete assistance to women in difficulty, promoting the creating of Help for Life Centres (CAV) to offer real alternatives to abortion (114, 2025)* ». This final sentence is key, for it is, above all, about cultivating the hope of finding an alternative for women in distress, who do not know whether to choose for their own bodies or to carry life. Theoretically and legally, these centres apply and uphold the possibility for the woman to make the final decision, namely, to resort to Law

194. Nevertheless, the strategy employed and deployed by these CAVs is not to inform or advise the woman/person (seeking help or considering recourse to voluntary termination of pregnancy) about what abortion entails in medical terms, nor about the existing and available options in terms of medical practice (non-obstetric gynaecologists), legal time limits, or foreseeable side effects. Instead, what is adopted is an approach of listening to the woman, underlining and affirming the recurring and almost archetypal scenario of the women entering these help centres: a pattern of nameless, inescapable distress. The CAVs intervene to provide these women with a renewed breath and impetus, as illustrated in the following passage, « *there is no strategy, there is listening (...) a woman who is left alone to live a pregnancy for various reasons (...) in this situation of complete solitude (...) the strategy that can be adopted is that of finally listening to a woman who is experiencing this situation because today unfortunately (...) if the women who live an unexpected pregnancy go to a hospital or a consultation centre to be helped, they often find themselves having a single way, a single solution, which is the abortion (I14, 2025)* ». Specifically, this assistance takes the form of initiatives and economic projects to support these women, a view upheld by several interviewees. Their action consists, on the one hand, in providing psychological and economic support, such as monthly financial aid of €200, voluntary or proposed consultations with psychoanalysts, or temporary housing intended to recreate a home of hospitality, peace, and mutual aid. These daily initiatives by local actors testify to a desire to dissuade and reason with women, through the provision of such temporary assistance, regarding recourse to voluntary termination of pregnancy. Thus, these awareness-raising actions aim to establish the CAVs' support structures as a public and free benchmark model for women considering abortion, while still offering a possible alternative.

Nevertheless, these operational and physical units of the **MpV**, run on a voluntary and solidaristic basis, rest implicitly on the primacy of defending life, provided it is supported and accompanied. Furthermore, the actors financing these economic projects through donations, along with the underlying ideology, remain questionable; they seek to present themselves and cultivate their image as beneficent and altruistic agents mobilized for a charitable cause. Indeed, the funding of these CAVs is vague and imprecise, as illustrated in the following excerpt « *the economic project of this foundation is private, it is the Italian Movement for Life that manages it (I14, 2025)* ». However, throughout my analytical research and this interview with the participant, we learn more about the functional and economic organizational structure of these CAVs, namely, that they are subsidized « *there is a foundation in Italy, called *Fundazione Vita Nuova* which gathers all the donations that are made by various people who know this foundation and transforms them into projects to be attributed to each CAV for some, not all,*

but for those mothers who have particular difficulties, that is, who cannot support themselves in any other way (I14, 2025)”. The *Fondazione Vita Nuova* serves as the philanthropic and economic support linked to the **MpV**. It was founded in 1994 by the lawyer Francesco Migliori, who was the first president of the **MpV** at that time. Accordingly, this passage attests that this natural economic and philanthropic support is established through the Gemma Project. The Gemma Project is promoted on its website as support for maternity. It consists of “*An eighteen-month program of proximate prenatal adoption, offered to women in Italy who, despite adverse circumstances, wish to carry their pregnancy to term (Fondazione Vita Nova, 1994)*”. This foundation, like the CAVs, asserts that through their mobilizations and actions, they make a tangible difference in supporting so-called difficult pregnancies through to term. Consequently, recourse to voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy would, through these actions, mobilizations, and strategies, be prevented, countered, and blocked, aligning with their implicit and inherent motivations. The excerpt highlights its implicit implications « *they immediately opened the first centers for help with difficult maternity care, mainly by connecting to churches and parishes (...) when a person is in a fragile situation, they enter that door and receive disinformation (I9, 2025)*”. This actor additionally observes that “*this participated to the promotion of the culture of stigma, the spread of the idea that abortion is a murder, that the woman who does it is wrong, that it is a bad thing (I9, 2025)*”. The strategies of the **MpV** are mobilized “*for maternity, but they try to block abortion (I10, 2025)*.” However, these strategies do not consider, nor provide a sustainable solution for, women in precarious economic, social, and discriminatory situations over the long term. This vector constitutes an additional and complementary form of violence from patriarchal society and Italian politics.

Furthermore, this initial strategic and physical structure of the **MpV** is reinforced by the publication of a political manifesto, *Si Alla Vita* (1978), and public campaigns illustrating a child in the mother’s womb, publicly confirming its dogmatic and strategic anti-abortion orientation, while simultaneously countering the emerging ideology of abortion as a right and choice promoted by the media and activism of the time. These two modes of mobilization and action serve as confirmation biases for the axiological, cosmological, and semantic axes of the **MpV**.

Despite a distorted definition and a scientifically inaccurate depiction of voluntary termination of pregnancy, which justifies their mobilizations and strategies by emphasizing concepts such as birth rate, fertility, and demographic deficit, this anti-abortion movement manages to construct a quasi-magical conception of maternity in the face of the legalization of abortion, an idea considered valid both conceptually and realistically according to their

position. This process of de-demonizing Italian anti-abortion actors lays the groundwork for and initiates their current strategic, dogmatic, and political hyper-normalization.

Indeed, this political and strategic dialectic of protecting life and the unborn child can be situated within a broader context beyond Italy. According to one of the interviewees, “*this approach is the American one that, starting from a direct political battle, has led, as a result of electoral victories, to banning abortion in 21 American states after the Supreme Court overturned the 1973 Roe vs. Wade ruling, which originated the idea of the right to abortion (12, 2025).*” These strategies confirm the religiosity and Catholic roots of the Italian anti-abortion movements, reinforcing the sacred culture of maternity, founded upon the supreme and divine being.

Moreover, the **MpV** anti-abortion movement is no longer simply a moralizing and judgmental actor on voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy; it now transforms into a political lobbyist with strategic interests in opposing abortion. This period marks the growing attention and space attributed to voluntary termination of pregnancy. It also signifies the beginning of a more engaged and continuous interaction between the movement and political actors.

However, one of the interviewees nuances the emergence of Italian anti-abortion movement strategies and their mobilization in the 1970s with the following excerpt « *Speaking of pro-life, I remember a congress, I think it was in Berlin, I don't remember, of the FIAPAC, where there was a pro-life demonstration outside the congress (...) The only place where we didn't have it was Rome, but we had it in Edinburgh, we had it in Seville, they came with the buses. I remember there was a lady who was demonstrating with a child in her arms (15, 2025)* ». On the one hand, this excerpt illustrates the use of an additional strategy that anti-abortion movements employed at that time: the humanization of the issue of voluntary termination of pregnancy. The presence of a newborn at the congresses of The International Federation of Abortion and Contraception Professionals (FIAPAC) concerning abortion reinforces the stigmatization and guilt associated with the practice and act of abortion. Through this approach, these actors demonstrate that voluntary termination of pregnancy is more than an ordinary choice; they now put a face to support and highlight the human dimension of abortion. All the strategies and repertoires of action employed by the **MpV** aim to confer a human dimension to recourse to voluntary termination of pregnancy. This involves personifying the cause to counter its occurrence by making it appear dangerous and blaming the women who resort to it, since, according to this staging, they are killing a child, in essence, the sacred life granted by the divine, which cannot be suspended or interrupted.

Nonetheless, as one interviewee emphasizes, the deployment of strategies by Italian anti-abortion actors in the 1970s must be relativized about their impact in the rest of Europe. Indeed, if we integrate a quantitative map of **MpV** mobilizations between the 1970s and 1980s, their actions are put into perspective. The 1981 referendum, the Life Listening Centers (CAVs), and protests in front of medical congresses on voluntary termination of pregnancy must be tempered by the broader Italian societal context, which was generally favourable to the ratification and implementation of Law 194, as demonstrated in the scientific literature, despite the persistent cultural and moral religiosity of Italy.

Furthermore, although the **MpV** systematically and methodically deployed actions and mobilizations against voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy, these actions were few. Beyond the introduction and formation of these strategies and mobilizations of anti-abortion movements, a crucial obstacle persists regarding access to abortion. Italy experiences multiple and organized resistance to the execution and practical implementation of Law 194. This refusal originates from doctors and gynaecologists: the refusal to perform voluntary terminations of pregnancy, invoked under the principle of conscientious objection, is paradoxical and oxymoronic. This systematic reluctance impacts the operational model and practical medical exercises of hospitals. One interviewee summarizes the situation succinctly: *“the interruption of pregnancy is part of the baggage of a professional who deals with gynaecology and osteoporosis (I5, 2025).”*

Despite the existence of these multiple obstacles, there remains a void within the anti-abortion movements of additional actors developing effective strategies and collaborating in the fight against voluntary termination of pregnancy.

In conclusion, in Italy, the 1970s marked the beginning of the process of creating anti-abortion movements and their strategies. Their strategies are diversified and targeted despite their limited number. These gradually integrate into moralizing actors as well as political pressure groups. During my empirical analysis of interviews concerning the strategies of anti-abortion movements in the 1970s–1980s, I highlighted that only a few individuals recognized the existence of strategies implemented by Italian anti-abortion actors at that time, notably by the **MpV**.

Overall, the culture of silence and guilt initiated by the strategies of the **MpV** constitutes an initiatory preamble to the rise of abortion as a moral, cultural, and ethical battleground in Italy, consequently giving rise to the democratization of the adoption of strategies and mobilizations by anti-abortion actors and movements to restrict it. Having the capacity and ability to access secure voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy is a privilege, albeit a legally

sanctioned one. The protection of reproductive health in this matter is not ensured by the State, which shirks its responsibilities and functions. The battle against Law 194 initiated by these actors constitutes a declaration of confrontation with political institutions, refusing to participate in the production of social change.

5.2.2. *Strategic Diversification and Association Building (1990s-2010s)*

The next two subsections will empirically examine and analyse, as well, my first and third hypotheses. My first hypothesis investigates the process of professionalization and institutionalization of the strategies and actors of the Italian pro-life movement. I posit that, from the 2000s onward, these actors underwent a restructuring and reconstruction with the involvement of political and legal actors in their mobilization, thereby reforming, professionalizing, and gradually democratizing and institutionalizing their activities.

The 1990s–2010s constitute the first key turning point for the democratization and thus the transformation of Italian anti-abortion actors and their strategies. This period represents an initiatory point of transition. Throughout this period, new social, legal, and movement actors were founded, such as the *Comitato Verità e Vita* for the **MpV**, the associations *Scienza & Vita*, and the *Forum delle Famiglie*. However, to maintain coherence in understanding the evolution of strategies and for the purpose of verifying these strategies, this empirical analysis focuses exclusively on the study of the evolution of the four actors under examination. In this context, during this period, the **MpV** was the sole existing actor actively participating in the construction of an Italian battle against voluntary termination of pregnancy.

Thus, until the early 1990s, according to some of the interviewees, the understanding of the introduction of voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy had been gradually constructed as a cultural war and a moral-political struggle, explained by the historical context. Until recently, few actors paid attention to this issue: “*actually even Catholics and Evangelicals before 1990, they did not care about abortion (I8, 2025),*” as one of the interviewees explained. Moreover, abortion was still considered a matter of “*privacy rights.*” At the beginning of the 21st century, the main concerns of public debates revolved around the expansion of Islam and terrorism. Beyond this, discussing voluntary termination of pregnancy was frowned upon, being considered neither a public health issue nor a matter of public order. Acting to expand abortion rights was not conceivable. Consequently, the integration of potential bodily autonomy and decision-making power for women into the public sphere was, and remains, hardly imaginable. The Italian state exercised considerable control over women’s bodies through the implementation of Law 194 effectively and efficiently.

At the international level, several treaties emerged, such as the Cairo Conference (1994) and Beijing Conference (1995), which legislated and, for the first time, internationally recognized reproductive and sexual rights, specifically concerning issues of abortion and gender. From 1990 onward, prominent historians and scholars, such as Norbert Robbio, introduced the notion of gender as a framework for a new discourse and strategy within anti-abortion movements. They defined gender in multiple ways, with variations, and united to create an “*ideological coalition on gender* (Kuhar, & Paternotte, 2020, pg 213).” This coalition was defined as “*a true body of thought (...) to oppose both feminist and LGBT activism (...) considering gender as the ideological matrix of a significant number of ethical and social reforms deemed contestable* (I6, 2025)”.

This innovative anti-gender trajectory within the scientific and academic milieu encompassed voluntary termination of pregnancy in its critique. This framing initiated a process of confrontation and polarization on the issue in Italy, allowing anti-abortion movements to shape public and political debates by developing new extra-ecclesiastical strategies that were explicitly claimed as apolitical.

Consequently, this anti-gender and anti-abortion evolution begins with the emergence of **the episcopal conferences of 1997 and 2007**. The first conference presented the Cultural Project oriented in a Christian sense, as a reaction to the introduction of gender and abortion issues into Italian public debates. They confirmed the alignment of anti-abortion movement strategies with their religious narrative of a new Catholic and Evangelical moral anthropology, inspired by John Paul II. This Christian moment is pivotal, producing a transformation within the Catholic world, as one interviewee noted: “*The Catholic church has 2000 years of history, and they never once talked about abortion or opposed it institutionally until the 20th century* (I8, 2025).”

This initiative called for no compromise and sought to ensure the protection of immutable values, such as the supremacy of life, threatened by the vector of voluntary termination of pregnancy, specifically, the life of a child in the womb. Beyond its symbolic use toward women concerning abortion, it represents the emergence of a redefinition of the Italian public and political sphere on this issue. Indeed, since public and political debates as well as strategies surrounding abortion in Italy were initially weak and minimal, the deployment of these new strategies and actions was carried out in juxtaposition with those of the Vatican, inaugurating a new era. This actor is crucial: it constructs a new semantic framework of language and strategy targeting gender and voluntary termination of pregnancy, utilizing the

encyclopaedic dictionary *Lexicon of Ambiguous and Controversial Terms on Life, Family, and Ethical Issues* in 2003.

Consequently, this episcopal conference initiated the most significant transformation for Italian anti-abortion movements, beginning in the early 21st century. By the early 2000s, Italian society was gradually secularizing. However, it is important not to conflate the Catholic Church (the Vatican) with its religious faithful (such as some of the anti-abortion actors: these are two distinct actors in terms of mobilizations and strategies). Accordingly, Italian Catholics and anti-abortion actors began rethinking and modernizing their strategies and public image through the use and implementation of a white, nationalist Christianity to rationalize their initiatives. Nonetheless, one interviewee attested that *“this is the complete loss of what Christianity is and just the misuse of any type of religion; to just defend their moral discourse, that it’s really immoral (...) I think they know that they cannot really justify their positions from a science point of view (I8, 2025).”*

The creation of this new Christianity by anti-abortion actors represents their emancipation and differentiation from the traditional theological framework, now defining their own interpretation of new human rights, such as abortion. The purported scientific basis for the non-recognition of voluntary termination of pregnancy rests on a claimed scientific validation of the supremacy of life. Anti-gender and anti-abortion positions thus become a decatholicized cosmological and ontological instrument, allowing the identification of the perceived ills of the 21st century in a vague, imprecise, and arbitrary manner. This political intervention by the Catholic Church, through the introduction of this project, seeks to offer an alternative course of action, reshaping the structure and functioning of the nation-state’s democratic framework.

To “scientize” their mobilizations, strategies, and discourses, they introduced a new method of strategic production and action implementation, involving the creation of supplementary bodies for political and legal participation. The establishment of these official instances demonstrates and scientifically validates their legitimate struggle to ensure the right to life for all. Therefore, in 2005, the **MpV** founded a legal body, the *Comitato Verità e Vita*, a supplementary structure aimed at confirming and validating their strategic deployment and mobilization. The *Comitato Verità e Vita* is tasked with *“raising flags that life is a right (I7, 2025).”* As one excerpt highlights, *“new anti-abortion centers and this association have been added, which have a more aggressive policy; they are moving in a civil sphere, so they do politics with the parties, they have lobbies (I9, 2025).”*

This excerpt confirms the renewal of Italian anti-abortion movements through the introduction of a new anti-gender, political, and de-Catholicized tradition, enabling them to

intervene in Italian public and political debates. Moreover, this organic transformation initiates the institutionalization of strategies and Italian anti-abortion actors within political spheres, through direct and supportive exchanges with these institutions. The **MpV** confirms this renewal and the recomposition of its strategies and territorial power through the presence of its members and volunteers strategically distributed across Italy: *“on a concrete commitment of about 10,000 people (...) The numbers are always very relative because there are more than 350 peoples in Italy in all Italian provinces and there are about 10,000 volunteers (I10, 2025).”* This interviewee emphasizes the centrality, for this actor, of integrating into localities to both influences daily medical practices and attempt to shift public mentalities.

Italian anti-abortion movements began their strategic re-foundation through this local and legal implementation. This contentious trajectory now interacts in tension both internally with the Catholic world and externally with the political sphere. Indeed, **MpV**'s strategies are now justified by the principle of “acting for the defence of life”: this anthropological and moral revolution is grounded in the primacy of natural law. This axiological revolution does not stop there; it becomes cosmological and strategic. This new stage is built on a specific operational mode: *“was kind of a trap that they tried to occupy (...) which the space of abortion for many years but became institutional cause, it had political exponents who had a political career, Carlo Casini in particular, but also linked to the Vatican (I11, 2025).”* This excerpt demonstrates the ambivalence inherent in the establishment of this new strategic process by Italian anti-abortion movements.

At the beginning of the 21st century, these actors had to determine the orientation and axis they wished to adopt to achieve their objective, the defence of life; they had to decide whether to remain within the Catholic lineage, continuing a similar line of action, or to enter the political arena to embed their interests within the institutional and political decision-making process. This recompositing of anti-abortion activism, linking mobilization with Italian politics, is innovative. Indeed, certain key figures within the **MpV** initiated the transformation of their traditional Catholic anti-abortion movement into a more radical and reactionary contentious field, a **“pre-neo-Catholic,”** anti-gender, and anti-abortion movement, gradually engaging with the political sphere, as illustrated in the figure.

For instance, the creation of the association **Scienza e Vita** by former MEP Carlo Casini scientifically grounded the study of gender, a project later continued by his daughter Maria Casini. This mechanism of political reappropriation was essential to ensure this new era, in which sexually mature women were no longer only intimidated regarding their desire to access voluntary termination of pregnancy, but also subjected to the pronounced violence of these new

actors, their strategies, and patriarchal policies against their aspirations for equality and equity in matters of gender, feminism, and social justice.

Thus, the truly culminating year marking the onset of this rupture for Italian anti-abortion actors is 2007. This year renews itself with the introduction of “gender” into the mobilizational spectrum. It marks the prelude to the strategic construction of gender theory within mobilizations and actions, following the first edition of the Family Day in 2007. As one interviewee underlined, this event progressively altered the strategic dynamic of mobilization within Italian anti-abortion movements: *“one of the biggest, certainly in the last 20 years was the first Family Day on civil rights, which was in 2007, and which was the first Family Day that was very active (I6, 2025).”*

The first Italian **Family Day of 2007** sought to provide a cultural response and a moral reconstruction in the face of the democratization of voluntary termination of pregnancy. It confirmed the beginning of an anthropological, axiological, and semantic strategic revolution within the **MpV**, laying the foundations for a **pre-neocatholic** model of the new anti-abortion actors who would follow.

I employ the term *pre-neocatholic* to designate this transitional moment, an axiological, cosmological, and semantic turning point. This **preneocatholic** phase represents a period of organizational, structural, and functional transformation. Its purpose was to *« the strategy is to make a change of mentality, and the Pro-Life movements should unite to do a common action to change the way of thinking of the people, but not because it is necessary to inform, but because it is right. It is right that no human being if he is in pain, if he is about to die and if he is old, it is not right to be killed (I7, 2025)”*. As the interviewee explains, this moment represented less a simple strategic adjustment than a fundamental shift of orientation: it was primarily about changing consciences. Moreover, for the movement itself, this **preneocatholic** mobilizing action proved decisive, as it sought to recover from the setback of the failed referendum on Law No. 40 (2005). Thus, the **preneocatholic** mobilization embodied in the 2007 Family Day brought two major transformations for the MpV.

On the one hand, this initiative initially arose in response to an internal challenge within the **MpV**, as highlighted in the following testimony: *“the subjects, who were tired of the calm, the movement for life, of Carlo Casini’s omnipresence, of the commission with politics (...) they created the March for Life (I11, 2025).”* On the other hand, this mobilization confirmed the birth of a new strategic orientation among these actors: *“they stopped going directly against Law 194; instead, they started to dialogue with the police and with a more institutionalized environment, having a background within some political forces (I11, 2025).”*

This historic anti-abortion movement thus altered its approach to strengthen its legitimacy and ensure its continued presence in public debates and political institutions: *The family is a concrete reality, not an abstract idea* (I2, 2025).” From this point onward, through this type of mobilization, they sought to present themselves as political actors defending a universal cause, the protection of life and the preservation of maternity.

Consequently, this **preneocatholic** prelude marked the threshold of a new strategic era: no longer a mobilization directed solely against abortion, since opposing a societal issue directly “is worthless, nobody will believe you or follow you”, but rather a reformulated mobilization. As one interviewee explained: “*if you read their messages, they say it, we are not against anyone, we are not against anything, we are for life (...) in their first paragraph, they tell you about an enemy that doesn’t have a face, that is not concrete, but in reality it is a culture of death. The enemy is identified and whoever wants to understand understands, but it is no longer the law* (I11, 2025).” This passage perfectly illustrates the **MPV’s** decatholicized and **preneocatholic** turn: this dechristianization is merely superficial, as they continue behind the scenes to interact with and maintain a close relationship with ecclesiastical authorities. Despite this critical reality, their strategies now appeared accessible and intelligible to a broader audience, since they were presented as allegedly depoliticized and popular, grounded in universal, intangible values invoked under the banner of supreme life.

The implementation of these new strategies proved even more violent than those preceding them. Indeed, their direct interaction with political institutions amplified and reaffirmed the legitimacy of their mobilizations in both the public sphere and political debate. This dynamic also contributed to the construction of a collective identity for the **MpV**, cohesive, coherent, and unified, allowing the wider network of Italian anti-abortion movements to situate itself within the postmodernity of the West and the global revolution of theology and natural morality. These actors positioned themselves in open opposition to the emerging “new world order” and the rise of gender ideology as a “*global cultural revolution*”, refusing to interrogate the very structures from which they originated (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2020, pg 208 & 2016).

Moreover, as one interviewee emphasized, the institutionalization process relied heavily on a new mode of functioning: “*they present themselves in a more popular way, they are speaking for the people, they have people who go down to the square with them, they have signatures, the signatures of petitions* (I11, 2025)” Accessibility and omnipresence thus became defining features of this transitional **preneocatholic** period, whose primary aim was to promote the sanctity of natural life from conception to death. The visibility and diffusion of the

defense of life discourse within Italian public and political debates gradually contributed to the democratization of this idea, breaking away from the traditional strategies of earlier anti-abortion movements.

This shift also drew inspiration from leftist repertoires of contention, as highlighted by another interviewee: *“they copy strategies that came from the left already in the 70s, which is unfeasible because there was what is called a recluse, a backwardness of political interest towards political matter (I11, 2025).”*

Nevertheless, despite the ambitious objectives associated with the 2007 Family Day, the event ultimately marked a failure. It failed to mobilize broader social movements, generate widespread awareness, or foster significant popular participation. For this reason, the changes initiated through the episcopal conferences and this event must be understood with nuance and moderation. The 1990s–2010s did indeed mark the beginning of a crucial turning point in the evolution of Italian anti-abortion strategies; however, these shifts unfolded within an Italian democracy and society that remained profoundly Catholic and religious, yet still relatively unreceptive to the framing of abortion and defence of life as pressing political concerns. What emerged instead was a renewal of strategies through **preneocatholic** mobilizations, increasingly grounded in the framing of gender ideology as a fundamental threat to life itself.

In conclusion, this period at the beginning of the 21st century can be summarized in a single sentence, as expressed by one interviewee: *“a bit for some lost battles, for example, the idea that Europe should have Christian roots, which was a debate that was quite strong in those environments (I11, 2025).”* This excerpt confirms my first hypothesis: the beginning of those strategies and the discursive framework transformation. Abortion and voluntary termination of pregnancy gradually disappeared from the lexical and mobilizational repertoire, giving way instead to the dogma of gender theory, whose effervescence drew strength from the resurgence of populism and political extremism. As a result, Italy emerged as the first European stronghold where a progressively organized mobilization was implemented to “preserve the human.” In this sense, it established itself as a model for the rest of Europe.

5.2.3. Professionalization and Institutional Integration (2010s–2020s)

5.2.3.1. A homogeneous or divided group?

The 2010s and 2020s are decisive: they constitute two decades of confirmation, institutionalization, and professionalization of the emergence of a neo-Catholic, anti-gender, and anti-abortion mobilization within the Italian public and political sphere. This final subsection enables me to continue testing my second and third hypotheses. From a structural, organizational, operational, and functional perspective, this period represents a *tabula rasa*

initiated by anti-abortion actors. The phenomenon is characterized by the creation of new associations, grounded in a renewed dogmatic-strategic framework and a novel repertoire of mobilization: one that is decatholicized, broad, and heterogeneous, and that fundamentally engages both publicly and politically.

To analyse this new genealogy, my empirical focus in this subsection will remain on four anti-abortion actors and their strategies: **Movimento per la Vita (MpV)**, **Pro Vita e Famiglia**, **Non Si Tocca la Famiglia**, and **Il Popolo della Famiglia**. This renaissance unfolds across four pivotal moments that will structure the analysis: (1) *the 2012 March for Life & La Manif pour Tous Italia*; (2) *the 2015 Family Day*; (3) *the 2019 World Congress of Families in Verona*; and (4) *the 2022 Meloni legislature*. These moments allow me to trace the continuity of both my second and third hypotheses.

The **neo-Catholic** essence of these new actors and mobilizations transforms both their strategies and their ideologies: a reconfigured form of Catholicism emerges, one that allows direct collaboration with the values and ideas of Italian populist and far-right parties. I therefore hypothesize that this new structure and repertoire of strategies multiply their visibility and legitimacy, rendering mobilizations against gender and voluntary termination of pregnancy normalized, even banalized, within everyday political discourse. The broader socio-economic and politico-diplomatic context of crisis and ambient fear has been one of the key factors driving this hyper-normalization. Throughout this section, I refer to these groups as **neo-Catholic anti-abortion actors** (Prearo, 2023; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2020, chap 2).

This chapter and period mark the fusion of Italian anti-abortion social mobilizations with state intervention in intimate, private, and often precarious decisions. Public funds are invested and deployed to curtail a fundamental right universally recognized and, within the framework of representative and participatory democracy, meant to be guaranteed by the state. Therefore, political institutions render this right malleable, restricting its accessibility and practical implementation according to their differentiated moral and ethical interpretations of cultural issues. Abortion thus becomes a matter of state intervention: when the right is undermined or obstructed, the state's interference deepens, regardless of public opinion or the general interest. Traditional left-right political divisions are thereby transcended and displaced. What emerges is a confrontation between antagonistic moral and axiological visions, which struggle to coexist. In this sense, abortion in Italy is not merely a semantic or legislative issue, but a symptom of deeper fractures in the very axiological, cosmological, and ontological foundations of society.

To understand the continuation of my empirical analysis, it is necessary to clarify the state and status of Italian anti-abortion movements at the beginning of this second decade. Their trajectory has oscillated between tendencies toward unification and homogenization, on the one hand, and heterogeneity and plurality, on the other. The interviewees were unable to provide a consensual response regarding the possible typology and nature of these **neo-Catholic** Italian anti-abortion actors, whether unified or heterogeneous: this question is characterized by considerable disparity. Among the sixteen participants, a relative majority of five described this anti-abortion movement as divided into different factions and sections. Very few (three) recognized and assumed that the ensemble of these actors functioned in a unified manner. Some respondents (two) adopted a more nuanced position, envisioning their functioning as a balance between heterogeneity and unification in terms of mobilization and action. Finally, several interviewees acknowledged that they did not know how to answer this question and refrained from taking a position. Their definitions of the status and condition of anti-abortion actors vary according to their personal understanding of these social movements.

The multiplicity of strategies mobilized by these **neo-Catholic** Italian anti-abortion actors stems from a specific and personal interpretation of the societal issue of voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy. As one interviewee underscores in the following excerpt, the new political dialectic of **neo-Catholic** anti-abortion actors does not automatically integrate this new genesis: *“others movements are completely absent from the political dialectic, while others prefer to carry out a sort of moral suasion in support of parties that would never include the option of overcoming abortion in their programs (I2, 2025).”* Their differences are articulated as follows: *“certainly on the modalities we often divide ourselves (...) the modalities (I6, 2025).”* These distinct modalities take shape in the diverse profiles of the movements: *“there is a pro-life movement but there have been various movements when there was the referendum on abortion (...) other groups that have a much clearer, more rigid vision; nevertheless life is not negotiable (I7, 2025).”*

They do, however, converge in conceiving life itself as both an instrument and a weapon of struggle. Thus, these actors fragment according to circumstances, acting alternately in place of one another: *“these movements carry out what they themselves call the contagion of politics, that is, for example, at election times, they ask various candidates to endorse a manifesto proposed by them. Other battles include fighting against gender issues in schools, defending their children (I12, 2025).”* Despite their divergences, these actors complement one another through their mutually reinforcing approaches, though lacking significant social, political, and societal resonance.

In sum, *“the pro-life movement in Italy is a pluralistic movement, articulated in different ways. The term Italian ‘factions’ recalls a concept of opposition that does not seem adequate to the reality of Italian Pro-Life. The Pro-Life movement encompasses different paths, different sensibilities, all committed to the defense of life. So, in truth, there is also considerable dialogue among the different components of the Italian Pro-Life associative panorama. We could say there is a diversity of approaches of interest (I10, 2025).”* This excerpt demonstrates that such plurality is mobilized to cultivate divergent national objectives as well as harmonized transnational ambitions. This homogeneity is reflected in the alignment of strategies and discursive framings within Italian anti-abortion actors. Indeed, as one interviewee emphasized, *“since the 2010s and onwards, we are seeing now a unified and homogeneous anti-rights and anti-abortion movement. They are all interconnected, you can see it with the language they are using (I8, 2025).”*

According to this conceptualization, these actors now share a common enemy broader than abortion itself: gender. This allows them to create and codify strategies and mobilizations that are standardized and collectively shared across the spectrum of anti-abortion actors, while adopting multiple, plural, and diverse means and mechanisms according to their needs and objectives. Ultimately, Italian anti-abortion movements of the early decades of the 21st century achieve transnational unification to more effectively influence this struggle, while at the national level they differentiate themselves through their specific mobilizing repertoires and complementary strategies, thereby covering the full spectrum of the debate.

Nonetheless, one interviewee underscores a crucial point for understanding this shift in direction and the search for a new definition of Italian anti-abortion movements: *“they try to make a strong network, pro-choice, but the political part, in my opinion, is missing. The political part is very important for this right in Italy (I9, 2025).”* The very essence of a social movement is to initiate social and societal change. In this case, Italian anti-abortion movements no longer position themselves solely against the voluntary interruption of pregnancy but rather as actors defending the supremacy of life, acting in different ways to cultivate their richness and effectiveness through the ideological framework of gender.

5.2.3.2. The Neocatholic Shift: recomposition and reconfiguration of Italy's Anti-abortion Movement

This subsection will empirically examine my third hypothesis, namely the demonstration of the Neo-Catholic shift within Italian anti-abortion movements' strategies. Hence, to pursue the examination of the evolution of the strategies of Italian anti-abortion movements, I will continue my analysis by beginning with the **MpV**. This historic Italian anti-abortion activist was the initiator of a major turning point in the restructuring and reconfiguration of mobilizations and repertoires of action, namely with **the March for Life in 2011**. Inspired by the French model *La Manif pour Tous*, the event adopted their codes while adapting them to the Italian national context. This event reshaped public and political debates throughout the 2010s and 2020s. It marked the redefinition of traditional objectives and the mobilizational reappropriation of Italian anti-abortion movements through the introduction of neo-Catholicism as both a field and a strategic framework for action.

The **2011 March for Life (Marcia per la Vita)** was the first watershed moment, attempting at once to address the crisis of the traditional Catholic sphere and that of conventional Italian anti-abortion social movements. As one interviewee noted, the very essence of this mobilization was that *"the March for Life was born against the 194 directly (III, 2025)."* Moreover, this **March** redefined and reconstructed the field of Italian anti-abortion movements: it was the first moment of differentiation between traditional and radicalized anti-abortion actors in Italy. At the same time, it marked the first moment of unification for oppositional Catholic militancy.

These actors coalesced around a renewed militant spirit, new ambitions, and strategies now founded upon gender theory and **neo-Catholicism**; that is, a form of extreme Catholicism. These innovations are clearly visible in the rhetoric and repertoires of action mobilized during the **March**: *"the March has no fear of declaring itself 'against': against abortion, against extracorporeal artificial insemination. It is defined as a challenge to the indifference and lukewarmness internal to the Italian pro-life world and to Catholicism at large, which is often frightened by life-related issues"* (Prearo, 2023, p. 77).

Furthermore, the movement was no longer solely oriented toward abolishing voluntary termination of pregnancy, but rather toward establishing itself as an instrument for cultural, popular, and collective awareness of the demographic danger represented by the legal presence of abortion in Italy. This reorientation is exemplified in the following excerpt: *"to make a change of mentality and the Pro-Life movements should unite to do a common action to change*

the way of thinking of the people because it is right to act for the defence of life (I7, 2025).” This union is now grounded in the promotion of the protection and defence of life.

Their rhetoric confirms this **neo-Catholic** renewal, moving beyond a narrow discourse to impose upon every citizen a strong and conservative societal project. As one interviewee observed, “**March for Life** has always been to privilege the speech on maternity (...) so it helps you to carry on a maternity project even when you don’t think of having it (I11, 2025).” Neo-Catholic anti-abortion movements thus aim to mobilize for a positive cause in the name of the good of humanity, promoting a traditional family model centred on maternity, natality, and kinship.

Consequently, voluntary termination of pregnancy has, from this point onward, emerged in public and political debates as the essence of the new Italian cultural and moral war dividing society: it becomes the confrontation between antagonistic cultural, moral, and ethical visions. The imaginary constructed around abortion no longer merely serves to reinforce stigma; it is deployed to demonstrate the consequences of gender revolutions, women’s emancipation, and feminism more broadly. This first mobilization of the new decade represents the reconstruction of the semantics, axiology, cosmology, and ontology of conventional Italian anti-abortion movements.

These innovations are manifested in three characteristics recognized by certain associations and interviewees: “*an extra-ecclesiastical mobilization, a reaffirmation of Catholicism, and a political reappropriation* (Prearo, 2023, p. 81).” Formerly, conventional movements are now primarily politically active actors, linking directly with political networks: in other words, they operate as political lobbies to defend life. This is exemplified in the creation of “*a peaceful army, to fight against abortion and any other attack on natural law* (Prearo, 2023, pg 79).” According to these new anti-abortion movements, marching in the streets of Rome is understood solely as the effective exercise of their right to freedom of expression, to assert and articulate their positions regarding the legal existence of voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy. For the first time, they express themselves collectively, in an organized and structured manner, unambiguously and freely, against both gender and abortion.

Thus, when the **2011 March for Life** was implemented, numerous scholars questioned the novelty of this activist approach: “*there were political figures that I had never seen on the street (...) because usually we were used to a kind of Catholic movement that went down to the square without some specific and important political figures (I11, 2025)*” an actor emphasizes. The presence of political actors underscores the mobilizational innovation of this march. It is, in effect, reactionary and political, in short, **neo-Catholic**. The concept of **neo-Catholicism**,

developed by the researcher Massimo Prearo (2023), represents a new understanding of Italian anti-abortion movements as actors now framed primarily in political terms.

A category above all political, situated at the intersection of traditionalism, conservatism, and extremism, both within the religious (Catholic) and, primarily, the political sphere. This specificity is evident over successive mobilizations, where exchanges between movements and political parties become routine and institutionalized. The origin of the resurgence and success of Italian anti-abortion movements lies in the entrenchment of **neo-Catholicism** within their epistemologies and axiology. The **2011 March for Life** perfectly illustrates the initial steps of this transformation of traditional Catholic anti-abortion movements into pre-political, **neo-Catholic** lobbying actors. The anti-abortion movements examined in this empirical analysis fit squarely within this new category of social movement.

The year following this mobilization, 2012, saw the emergence of the second edition of the March for Life in Italy. It continued the trajectory set by the **March 2011**, acting as a marker and confirmation bias for this new semantics, cosmology, and political ontology of Italian anti-abortion movements, to prompt political institutions to respond directly and personally to these emerging issues. The **2012 March** reaffirmed the conceptualization of life as sacred and to be protected at all costs to achieve ultimate happiness for all human beings; in this view, the meaning of all human existence is realized. Moreover, the objectives of this mobilization remain deliberately vague regarding the identification of a distinct and shared enemy: *“an enemy that doesn’t have a face, an enemy that is not concrete, but it is a culture of death (III, 2025)”* The deliberate non-definition of the culture of death allows each participant to interpret this new enemy as they see fit, whether as abortion, gender, or women’s emancipation; all measures are designed to facilitate convergence toward a common battle and a unified front. Above all, however, the struggle is focused on the protection of life itself, rather than opposing voluntary termination of pregnancy. This shift allows anti-abortion movements greater freedom of action and the ability to reach a wider audience: *“by changing the communicative register, there are no longer against something but defending and fighting for something else (III, 2025).”* The evolution of the discursive framing of mobilization is thus essential to legitimize this struggle for the defence of human life, rather than opposition to a specific societal issue.

Consequently, repertoires of action are renewed with the attempt to introduce a political project: they draw inspiration from an Atlantic model and are extremely coercive toward women seeking to undergo voluntary termination of pregnancy: *“importing from the United States, which is the Fœtus Battle, which are all strategies of dissuasion even violent from a psychological point of view to make a lever on the objection of consciousness, which is one of*

the strong points in Italy. Therefore, try to limit not only the presence of doctors on the territory, for whom we know (...) There are regions where there are few doctors compared to the requests (...) that present themselves as committees that help to carry out a project, a maternity project, but in reality they are projects that are really very strong (...) Then the strategies have also been the concealment of a political project that before was not less violent, because it was as much as the movement for life, but that we were doing a little more with a series of assumptions that instead want to be skipped (III, 2025).” In light of this passage, these anti-abortion actors calculate every step to continue obstructing access to and the practicability of the right to voluntary termination of pregnancy at all levels of society. The renewal of these strategies and their determination to block abortion confirm the implementation of an underlying political project behind their actions.

Consequently, for the *MpV* association, which is at the origin of this new wave of mobilization restructuring this generation, the term “strategy” to act for the defence of life is considered inappropriate and does not apply here; the deployment of their actions is, according to them, natural and spontaneous. This approach, which downplays the deliberate nature of their actions and mobilizations, aims to create a political backdrop, that is, to secure direct financial support or political communication to enable the implementation of their politically oriented project. The affirmation and public display of this political project become visible through the introduction of these new strategies: the political project consists of countering the culture of death, promoted by the legal right to voluntary termination of pregnancy, through innovative, political, and standardized repertoires of action and strategy, sometimes violent and aggressive, to promote a culture of life, exemplified by the traditional/nuclear family model (father, mother, and child), prohibiting recourse to abortion.

This recomposition of Italian anti-abortion movements, driven by this new political project, emerged over the course of successive mobilizations: a collaboration between traditional Catholic, family-oriented anti-abortion actors and the radicalized innovators, extreme in their Catholic commitment and strategies, supported by far-right actors, now dividing into ecclesiastical movements and anti-abortion movements. Across successive Marches for Life, congresses, and conferences organized by *MpV*, new anti-abortion actors emerged, such as *ProVita e Famiglia* and *NonSiToccaLaFamiglia*. The development of these new associations occurs collaboratively, participatively, and cooperatively with other traditional, neo-Catholic, and pioneering anti-abortion actors, coordinating strategies and topics to be addressed and implemented in public debates and political decision-making. They seek to harmonize their activities and mobilizations to realize their political project.

Thus, **ProVita e Famiglia** was founded in 2012 by Toni Brandi (the president) and Jacopo Coghe (the spokesperson). Initially, they were previously known as *ProVitaAll* or *ProVita Onlus*. Over time, their denomination evolved into **ProVita e Famiglia** to adapt to their target audiences and affirm their intrinsically political character, founded on the defence of life and traditional family values, leaving sexual education to parents. This anti-abortion association has become, and remains, the most prominent actor in Italy: politically virulent and engaged in this crusade against gender ideology (and, consequently, voluntary termination of pregnancy).

At the European and international level, **ProVita e Famiglia** demonstrates its influence through a prominent presence at the World Congress of Families (WCF). In addition, the association is organized locally, nationally, and internationally, with a structure encompassing 110 local territorial anchors across Italy. They have also established an initiative to listen to, inform, and advise women on the consequences of voluntary termination of pregnancy through a hotline called “*Sos Vita*.”

Regarding its terminological determination, the name “*ProVita*” refers to “*Pro-Life*,” and this designation is intrinsically strategic. It seeks to legitimize their representation and position, as one interviewee explains: “*ProVita, when it was born, it was called ProLife News, because it was a newspaper, then it became Notizia e ProVita in Italia, then ProVita News, and finally ProVita e Famiglia (...) They still have this name, it is the name of those who cannot speak, so it is the name of a life that exists but that cannot speak (III, 2025).*” This Pro-Life title, imported from the United States into the European and Italian context, also authorizes their mobilizations and actions, as their mission is framed around defending life. The protection of life constitutes the new axiological and semantic strategy of these neo-Catholic Italian anti-abortion actors: “*it is an attempt, precisely not to say that we are against, but we are in defense of people who do not exist, but who cannot speak, but who exist in some way, it is the nascent life (III, 2025)*” as this excerpt emphasizes.

Asserting themselves as Pro-Life is a calculated and subtle way to affirm and imply opposition to voluntary termination of pregnancy, which they consider a crime and homicide (see iconographic references), while preparing a political project aimed at restoring the natural and biological order of humanity based on a divine defence of life. This linguistic semantics and strategic framing ground the perceived goodness for humanity promoted by the association through its existence and actions, as well as through the representation of gender theory as characterized by fear and terror: urgent and concrete action is deemed an anthropological imperative.

The association's repertoires of action are diverse, encompassing awareness campaigns, informational initiatives, petitions, and social and political actions. Their primary strategy is to inform and educate women in distress about the consequences of potential recourse to voluntary termination of pregnancy, using both local and national awareness campaigns. The hotline "*Sos Vita*," along with other Pro-Life listening lines, strongly emphasizes the alleged psychological and physical consequences for women who have had abortions: "*this is something that has been proven by the numerous calls, e-mails, and requests that come from women who have aborted. I tell you that all of them say something in common. If I had known, I wouldn't have done it (I12, 2025)*" describes the interviewee, referring to hypothetical post-abortion syndromes that are not scientifically verified. In effect, this portrayal and these testimonies reinforce a stigmatizing, terrorizing, and violent imaginary: abortion is depicted as plunging women into absolute and irreversible distress. From a scientific standpoint, these arguments constitute misinformation and inaccuracies, based on a flawed understanding of the empirical realities behind this medical procedure.

To ostensibly assist women in danger, their mission increasingly focuses on a process of regular accompaniment for pregnant women finding themselves in precarious situations: "*an association that mainly deals with training and information (...), more closely social activities, because we donate for life, give gifts to mothers in need, and we opened a house, rented an apartment near a large hospital here in Rome, which is the Policlinico Gemelli (I12, 2025).*" This excerpt illustrates multiple strategies: a daily and continuous rooting in the lives of these women. They intrude into the intimacy and privacy of a medical decision and situation, undermining it if it does not conform to what they assert as a legal, just, and biologically rightful act. Additionally, they collaborate with the *CAV* of *MpV*, highlighting the close ties of exchange and strategic cooperation between actors within the same field.

Furthermore, these strategies are situated within a broader perspective, beyond voluntary termination of pregnancy. *ProVita e Famiglia* seeks not only to defend life but also to oppose "the ideological colonization of gender theory," which, according to them, is responsible for the demographic destruction of Italian society. This constructs a new essence for these extremist Catholic anti-abortion movements: a political purpose to restore a just, equal, and fair world and society for all members of the nation, following the historically pre-established natural and biological order of the nuclear family model.

Indeed, this new semantic framework of action constitutes the foundation for introducing a common political project across all these so-called "Pro-Life" associations, which are strategically innovative. Their common enemy is now gender ideology, including voluntary

termination of pregnancy. This political proposal also seeks to modify the legal status of access to abortion in Italy, to eradicate it. Accordingly, this political action plan raises the question of *“the type of society we want to have, continue to build, think about, and imagine (...) and with what they propose, it is in some way an answer and a proposed solution to resolve this virus affecting Italy (...) a capacity to imagine a new society where people are protected on one side and free on the other (I11, 2025).”*

The redefinition of the semantics, axiology, and ontology of society is a key aspect of these neo-Catholic anti-abortion movements. It transcends traditional left-right divisions and gives rise to a new, perilous dissension: a fraction of values and worldviews pitting two antagonistic and irreconcilable social groups against each other. The expansion of their rhetoric and strategy has enabled them to operate at the European and international levels, gaining access to and participating in new spheres of power, carrying this crusade into the highest and most influential arenas.

The political dimension of these new actors also introduces another characteristic: the *peopleization* of the struggle. This issue must not, however, be reduced to a populist or celebrity-driven frame. Central concerns, namely, the exchange relations between movements and politics, conscientious objection, the entry of these actors into waiting rooms, and numerous other obstacles to secure access and practicability of abortion, remain. It is crucial to move beyond a paternalistic, sexist, and patriarchal understanding of this medical practice: it is far too important and serious for such simplifications.

At the same time, another association was founded: *NonSiToccaLaFamiglia*. This association emerged in 2013 within a context asserting that gender ideology represents the new form of colonization of modern Western societies. It also positions itself as an actor acting against this ideology. Their principal mission is *“to enhance the value of life up to the end, as well as for abortion in early life (I6, 2025)”*. Moreover, their primary objective is to advocate for education shielded from the influence of gender ideology and sexual awakening, holding that children’s instruction should be provided by members of the traditional family. To support the scientific legitimacy of this new battle, the association references historical frameworks, notably citing a publication by Giuliano Ferrara and statements by former Pope Francis on gender: *“as an ideological colonization that has been a kind of experimentation that had been adopted with children and he said that with children you cannot experiment because they are not laboratory cables (I6, 2025).”* This demonstrates how a **neo-Catholic** anti-abortion movement constructs its essence on an alleged scientific veracity of defending human life, grounded in persistent traditional Catholicism.

This association recognizes the existence of strategies that are intelligently formulated and implemented at the national level to defend family values, as highlighted in the following excerpt: *“the strategies that we have tried to implement have been, first of all, the compactness, that is to be always united on some points that have never separated us and therefore to put pressure in a journalist, cultural, even political way, trying to contaminate a little the decision-making area, above all political, but also to take charge of being and serving as a unified compact front in public communication, including the internet (I6, 2025).”* This passage not only acknowledges the presence of contagion strategies but also confirms both Prearo’s (2023) theoretical framework and my second and third hypotheses.

The development of this new model of strategic contagion is exemplified by the association: *“our online blog channel and the commitment of a radio network called Radio Mater are the channels of communication, in addition to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, where we can convey our message (...). We have been connected for ten years to a cinema project in schools in collaboration with a famous director in Italy, Pupi Avati, who on the themes of family, education, freedom and love has guarded a very strong influence on the episodes that we have carried out in these years (I6, 2025).”* These communication tactics are simple, multiple, and omnipresent: the key objective is to reach as many people as possible. Beyond these numerous communication channels used as strategic tools of influence, the association also occasionally publishes essays and articles both online and in print in *La Verità*, *La Bussola Quotidiana*, and *Realtà dell’Opposizione*. This latter method grants them a pretension of scientific authority and credibility in the public sphere, as well as in public and political debates.

This **neo-Catholic** and anti-abortion anchoring is further confirmed in the first ***Manifestation pour Tous Italia (LMPTI)***, an association founded and led by Filippo Savarese and supported by **CitizenGo Italia**, representing the true grounding of anti-gender mobilizations in Italy. These activists and this association, like their counterparts, claim to be *“of no party, nor of any religion.”* Nevertheless, this action, inspired by the French model of the *Manifestation pour Tous*, is publicly endorsed by the Vatican and Pope John Paul II. The work *Remaining in the Truth of Christ*, notably written by Cardinal Bagnasco, reasserts gender as an ideological colonization and a threat to the entirety of Western societies (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2020, pg 209). This fact confirms the close link between religious institutions and social movements in Italy. It demonstrates the participation and involvement of **LMPTI** in the crusade against gender, namely, to block institutional, political, or legal reforms. Accordingly, **LMPTI** establishes itself as the symbolic leader of this struggle, initiating a new cycle of extra-Catholic and anti-abortion mobilization and creating a novel space in which emerging anti-

abortion actors interact (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2020, pg 210). Nevertheless, this mobilization remains historically aligned with traditional Catholic anti-abortion actors (Prearo, 2023, p. 115).

Following the *Manifestation pour Tous Italia in 2015* and several smaller local Family Days, the first **national Family Day (FD)** emerged. This event represents the model of action for promoting traditional family values through an annual national celebration orchestrated by these anti-abortion actors. The advent of the two successive **Family Days (FD)** in 2015 and 2016 constitutes two decisive national moments for Italian and European anti-abortion movements, delivering a clear and successful message: gender ideology and voluntary termination of pregnancy constitute the anthropological and humanistic peril of the twenty-first century; the “*devil’s manure* (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2020, pg 216)” The evolution of the repertoires of action and strategies of Italian anti-abortion actors has paid off: they have successfully remobilized and built a new, engaged, enthusiastic, proactive, and politically represented militant base. These two days, devoted to celebrating the honor of the traditional family, managed to mobilize nearly two million people in the streets of Rome: “*we were finally able to make the word gender appear in the newspapers, and therefore stop this ideology* (I6, 2025).”

Additionally, each mobilization bears witness to the radicalization of Italian anti-abortion movements, through the presence, on one hand of politically engaged traditional Catholic actors, and on the other, more radical actors from the far right, populist, and neo-fascist spheres. The imposition of this politically oriented propaganda within their discourses and strategies is clearly illustrated in the following excerpt: “*With the XXI century, that position gradually diminished, revitalizing suddenly thanks to the **Family Day events of 2015-2016**. Around that experience, more agile and less ‘institutional’ pro-life movements emerged, from the **People of the Family to Provita**, which alongside other groups have strengthened a real associative galaxy that chose the overall strategy of a more massive media presence that did not exclude radical opposition to secularist positions. These positions were also reinforced by the very strong statements of Pope Francis, particularly that made on October 10, 2018, stating that ‘aborting is like hiring a hitman* (I2, 2025).” This passage attests to the symbiosis between the political world, the Catholic world, and Italian anti-abortion actors. In addition, the **Family Days** allowed the assembly of more than 100 associations, constituting the emergence of a large neo-Catholic anti-abortion network: “*the constitution which today is called the network of Italo on the roofs, which is a network that has about 100 associations (...) brings together many themes related and connected to the heart of the human being, the life from conception to natural death* (I6, 2025).” Indeed, existing anti-abortion actors expanded through the creation

of a broader network, as highlighted in the following excerpt: *“we were already big after Family Day we united with another association pro-life united with Generation Familia that was born from Guida e Familia that became a bigger association being united in two but it wasn't what brought us big consensus they continued before and after (113, 2025).”*

Furthermore, these networks are pivotal because it was the first time an anti-abortion mobilization managed to achieve its objectives and initiate political change: *“The only thing we were able to break in that context was the adoption by gay couples, so the fact that that was one of the results of those squares, we can say that from that moment on one of the largest cultural campaigns has opened, which in Italy then gave rise to the birth of dozens of associations, committees and cultural realities that on this felt the obligation to make a body, to join in a single battle that could defend not only the family, not traditional, but the natural family, the one that naturally in the union between a man and a woman gives rise to life (16, 2025).”* This excerpt reflects the ultimate objective behind the emergence of their transformation: to restore the biological and normative order of society based on the natural family, constituted by a man and a woman united through the fruit of their union, the birth of a child. Accordingly, the struggle to contain the spread of abortion in Italy is motivated by these new strategies and discursive framings.

In summary, at the beginning of this new decade, these three decisive moments constitute the most important turning point for the evolution of strategies and discursive framings of Italian anti-abortion actors. This phenomenon is characterized by new traits such as extremism, radicalism, and the integration of the political sphere, implemented within a socio-economic and historical-political context favourable to this new grammar and its operationalization. Indeed, the transformation of these actors and their strategies exists thanks to their fusion with politics and a more visible and pronounced political backing: *“Before it was a separate movement, it was something on its own that did its activities, certainly supported, as we have seen from the polls of tomorrow, the relations between 40 Days for Life and Forza Nuova lasted for a decade or so. There were already relations, but they were more under the bench, they should not be shown because it was not so organised that we could say we have to decide what to do with the body of others. Instead, perhaps at this moment it is more entrenched with politics (14, 2025).”*

The Italian socio-political context thus encourages the emergence and presence of anti-abortion movements in the public and political spheres. This legitimacy has been institutionalized through determined political interests and agendas: the political projects of certain parties, such as ***Fratelli d'Italia (Salvini)*** and ***Forza Italia (Meloni)***, embody these

ideals and values within themselves. These neo-Catholic anti-abortion actors demonstrate the perceived irrationality of access to voluntary termination of pregnancy, which is further promoted and reinforced, this time, through a novel strategic element in this period: direct and visible support from political power. Italian institutions and political actors openly display their orientation, initiating consequential changes.

The origin of this transformation is evidenced by the creation of a political party (Italian anti-abortion association) in 2016: ***Il Popolo della Famiglia***. This anti-abortion and pro-family actor openly acknowledge its political engagement: “*Il Popolo della Famiglia has a directly political approach to the issue and argues (...) that only a direct approach asking for electoral support for a programmatic platform that includes a commitment to the defense of unborn life can counter the spread of abortion (I2, 2025).*”

A consultation of their website provides further insight into the emergence of these new strategies. Regarding anti-abortion political associations such as ***Il Popolo della Famiglia***, their political project is the *Maternity Income (RdM)*. This initiative seeks to provide a financial allowance for Italian women and mothers who wish to care for their children and oversee their education. This proposal carries a fundamentally political rationale, aimed at revalorizing maternity and ensuring the freedom of choice for Italian mothers by guaranteeing their economic viability. Accordingly, this legislative initiative is inherently prescriptive, as it promotes a normative model of action and life structure to be followed by Italian mothers. Its mission is to foster the nuclear family through the promotion of the culture of life, underpinned by the association’s political values and priorities framework, ***Prima la Famiglia***.

The strategies employed by this association are, in essence, traditional, despite their conservative political connotations: they include proposing a popular bill aimed at ensuring the culture of life, awareness-raising, communication, mobilization, event creation around family and maternity values, and political affiliation. These repertoires of action are conventional, measured, and moderate: the association’s mission is to build the solid foundations of the culture of life through the development of a political project, exemplified by this legislative proposal. Although a minor and secondary actor within the broader spectrum of anti-abortion movements, ***Il Popolo della Famiglia*** nonetheless confirms the transformation and evolution of these actors’ strategies. This evolution is expressed through the declaration of a crusade against gender ideology, and ultimately, voluntary termination of pregnancy, supported by a political project and strategies of a radical political nature, aimed at establishing the culture of life and the nuclear family. Moreover, these anti-abortion organizations enjoy explicit political

support, as exemplified by the case of the association **Il Popolo della Famiglia**, which **Giorgia Meloni** publicly thanked for its activities in her inaugural speech.

At the national level, this metamorphosis in the strategies of anti-abortion movements is confirmed by the evident emergence of a movement–political and extra-ecclesiastical exchange, as highlighted in the following excerpt: *“close interlocutions with many institutions, ministries, with politics, even though it is an apolitical and apartheid association (...) we started a close work especially with the **Ministry of Public Education** (...) up to the achievement of a great victory, which was that a **MIUR** note in 2018 (I6, 2025).”* This passage confirms the constant and fluid communication between the political world and the anti-abortion associational sphere. This reciprocal influence was further evidenced by the **2019 World Congress of Families in Verona**.

This confirmation was demonstrated by **the event of 2019**, which brought together associations and anti-abortion actors from around the world. The mobilization made visible the institutionalization of anti-abortion movement strategies developed over several years, both by representatives of these movements and by political actors personally engaged in defending the culture of life and the family. The congress underscores the instrumentalization of gender ideology as a political and propaganda tool for anti-abortion activism, while maintaining its modern and radical religious dimension, distinct from the Vatican. The significance of this event can be summarized in a single statement: *“a decisive moment was the **Congress in Verona**: from then on, their political agenda developed with much greater force and clarity (...) it was only with the **Congress in Verona** that I realized it was something very real and consolidated (I16, 2025).”*

However, most interviewees did not identify this event as pivotal for the Italian context. Indeed, among the sixteen participants, only three cited the **2019 World Congress of Families in Verona** as a culminating point of change for the action repertoires of Italian anti-abortion movements. Greater emphasis is placed on the *Family Days of 2007, 2015, and 2016*, as well as the current legislature, as markers of transformation and evolution in the strategies and action repertoires of Italian anti-abortion movements and actors.

Nonetheless, the following excerpt illustrates why this congress can be understood and conceptualized as decisive: *“**2019** stands out as a critical year, marked by the **Verona meeting** and developments involving Berlusconi and Navarro, which signaled a broader political realignment. Furthermore, Maurizio Gasparri appears to have been one of the earliest figures to align himself with the anti-choice movement (...). For several years, he introduced this bill*

annually (...). Nonetheless, there was a clear acceleration in 2019. After 2019, the most significant turning point was Giorgia Meloni's rise to power (19, 2025)."

Accordingly, within this empirical analysis, and to demonstrate my second and third hypotheses, the **2019 Verona Congress** should be positioned rather within the continuity of previous mobilizing events of the anti-abortion movements. It represents a nuanced reaffirmation and confirmation of a political movement alliance that is now progressively visible, notably through the presence of Matteo Salvini, Marco Bussetti, and Lorenzo Fontana.

The *final turning point of the 2010s–2020s* period occurs with the new legislature of 2022, led by **Giorgia Meloni, the Italian Prime Minister**. This new head of state in the European context adopts a fundamentally pro-life approach regarding social, moral, and ethical issues, such as voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy. This can be illustrated by two revealing facts. During her political campaign, this rising figure of the Italian far right had already set the tone regarding the issue of abortion in Italy, with the widely recognized slogan: *“sono Giorgia, sono una madre, sono cristiana”* (“I am Giorgia, I am a mother, I am Christian”) (Meloni, G., 2019, 19 October). This slogan clearly establishes the directive line of the new government as anti-abortion, or in other words, pro-life, actively aligned with radical Catholicism.

Furthermore, **Giorgia Meloni's** first official speech confirms the significance of this new period with the declaration: *“io sono il Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri (...) non la prima”* (“I am the President of the Council of Ministers (...), the first, not in feminine framework”) (Meloni, G., 2022, 25 October). These two facts are pivotal: they assert and signal the beginning of a major social and political turning point for the right to voluntary termination of pregnancy. The Italian state will seek to marginalize and discriminate against all women and/or queer bodies that do not conform to the conventional order of living in and inhabiting their bodies as defined by the nation's legal and political institutions. Resorting to or practicing voluntary termination of pregnancy is thus labelled a mark of non-conformity.

Consequently, for anti-abortion movements, this political signal is a clear and hopeful message. Through this political dynamic, these actors aim to concretely achieve their objective: the progressive dismantling of LGBTQIA+ rights and the right to abortion, to restore the societal natural order of the nuclear family.

Thus, under this political directive, Italian civilization is founded upon the biological complementarity of the sexes: a classical biological determinism that associates abortion with the destruction of humanity and the end of Italian civilization. The Italian government now confers upon itself the authority to act publicly and openly against abortion, including the

dismantling of the societal order and structure of public and political bodies. The harmfulness of the strategies deployed by Italian anti-abortion movements lies in the essence of this new legislature: a government that directly endorses and participates in this cultural war, supporting the axiological and semantic frameworks of these actors through political discourse and financial aid, that is, taxpayers' money.

This direct, coercive, and offensive involvement of political power with anti-abortion movements is highlighted in the following passage: *"Italy, maybe because Italy is helped by the institutions directly, so you will know that since the Meloni government, there have been deliberations to bring associations of the third sector, in some places. It happened in Turin, with the famous room of the Ascolto, and what is serious there is that people are paid without any professional competence (...) That we, operators of support, do not intervene with the woman and that if the woman is not sure, we do not offer all the possibilities. This is what the law says, but it is a very ideological thing, very instrumental, to condemn and reject totally (15, 2025)."*

The Italian state is progressively abandoning its democratic component, as it conditionally defends and ensures the human rights of the citizens inhabiting its territory. Indeed, it grants itself the right to exclude persons and bodies that do not fit into the categories and structures it has established as legal, proper, and just. Furthermore, Italian political institutions utilize anti-abortion movements as tools and strategic resources to physically and practically dismantle abortion. The elimination of this medical practice and public health right is justified through ideological, moral, and ethical preconceptions, often disconnected from medical and scientific realities. Moreover, the state becomes an implementer of its own interests and the political intentions of Italian anti-abortion movements: *"they were happy about this alliance between the world of the party and the world of the parish. And as guests there were also Italian parliamentarians. A city that has no political meaning, which is not the capital of the region. It is a small city, 40,000 inhabitants. They hosted a senator and a parliamentarian together with a crowd of 30-50 people from the city, who were those of the church and those who vote for Giorgia Meloni and have the card of the party of Giorgia Meloni. And they were talking about this creation of an alliance between the two worlds. So, this is a strategy that is still happening in the outskirts of Italy. That these two worlds come together, which started to come together a few years ago. But in short, it is still happening in the smaller cities. This is one thing. Then the strategies that they apply are national (19, 2025)."* This passage demonstrates the intent of both parties to initiate a process of integration and normalization of Italian anti-abortion movements within the political sphere and public debates. Initially, this

occurs at the local level concerning voluntary termination of pregnancy, and subsequently, it expands nationally through extra-ecclesiastical participation employing methods of contamination and contagion within political power, ensuring durable insertion. This argument is reaffirmed in the following excerpt: *“I would focus on this apart from the contagion strategy, for example, which is really well described by Dr. Prearo and I believe that at this stage we find ourselves in a situation where within the government itself or in any case within government offices we recognize representatives linked to the anti-choice world. I am talking about Minister Roccella, for example, and I am talking about the Speaker of the Chamber, Fontana, who, although not part of the government, is clearly connected to Massimo Gandolfini, I am talking about Assuntina Morresi, I am talking about Mantovano (I12, 2025).”*

The interconnection of these actors is, de facto, facilitated by the reciprocity of interests, methods, and strategies adopted to counter voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy. Moreover, the movement–politics collaboration is reinforced through the embedding of stigma promotion within the political sphere and public space, framing abortion as morally wrong or even as murder, both in parliamentary benches, press conferences, and political campaigns.

The purported positions of this government regarding gender ideology and voluntary termination of pregnancy have become clear through these initial political actions. A first significant measure concerns abortion in Italy, with the adoption of the **PNRR** decree (April 2024): *“abortion experience is a speech that arises because the government in the decree with which the PNRR was restructured decided to insert an amendment that had nothing to do with the reasons for the national recovery and resilience plan and wrote clearly that within the counseling centers associations fundamentally anti-choice will also be able to operate (I12, 2025)”* This decree exemplifies the tangible influence of these new neo-fascist and neo-Catholic anti-abortion movements, modeled on the United States. The potential authorization for these movements to gain access to public and secular medical centers represents a deliberate stance and a clear signal from political actors. Italian anti-abortion movements are thereby granted the capacity to directly influence decisions regarding women’s bodies, in essence, their legally protected right to abortion under Law 194. Furthermore, this attempted intrusion into hospital settings embodies extreme violence, culpabilization, and stigmatization of those seeking abortion.

The adoption of this decree constitutes a significant change for these actors, demonstrating the effectiveness of their existence, as described in the following excerpt: *“within these associations for the protection of motherhood there were no associations that with their actions attack or anyway threaten the existence of a right and of a service that must*

be provided within the counseling centers which is that of voluntary interruption of pregnancy (I12, 2025)."

Consequently, the maternity project is institutionalized directly by the state as the sole valid and legal model. This mode of operation and structuring is corrosive, discriminatory, stigmatizing, and excluding, not only toward women as individuals but also toward public health bodies if women have sought abortion, as the following excerpt emphasizes: *"New anti-abortion centers have been added, which have a more aggressive policy, they are moving in a civil sphere, so they do politics with the parties, they have lobbied. So now the issue has been strengthened, but some things have always been there (I9, 2025)."*

In effect, the state becomes an obstructionist of voluntary abortion by participating actively, as confirmed by the passages above and below, underscoring the centrality of state involvement in enabling the emergence, constitution, and success of new effective anti-abortion strategies: *"all this violence has strengthened the determination of those involved in the pro-life movement, ensuring that this voice is now difficult to silence. There have also been small concrete victories, such as the presence of anti-abortion activists in counseling centers, which have been heavily contested, particularly by the feminist movement. In fact, we are in a moment of strong ferment for the pro-life reality, which is evolving, and which especially needs to achieve full organizational unity to be more effective (I2, 2025)."*

The boundary between movement and politics no longer exists it has become a continuous and fluid exchange of interaction, interdependence, and dialogue. Nevertheless, the visibility of this communion between Italian political parties, the Italian government, and neo-Catholic anti-abortion movements appeared to emerge suddenly. Yet, this alliance was in fact predictable, underlying, and previously concealed. Several iconographies illustrate the emergence of this trust-based relationship between movement and politics, such as the Italian Catholic think tank ***Ditelo Sui Tetti***. This organization, alongside the political party ***Fratelli d'Italia***, photographed and published the formation of this discreet yet powerful bond between these social and political actors.

Beyond this initial major event, a second occurrence confirms the transformation and shift in trajectory between the Italian government and anti-abortion movements: *"This government's actions represent a decisive turning point (...) not only because of the measure already undertaken but also because of the broader signs of ideological contamination that these actions reveal. Furthermore, the resignation of Deputy Chief of Staff Spano, revoked shortly after his appointment by Minister of Culture Giuli, highlights the influence of ProVita e Famiglia, which not only claimed credit for the reversal through a petition but also framed it*

as a warning to the government. Such pressure on ministerial autonomy is deeply troubling in a democratic context, where appointments should rest on legitimate authority. The government's closeness to the anti-choice movement is further evident in the appointment of Massimo Gandolfi as a consultant and in the candidacy of spokesperson of *ProVita e Famiglia* Maria Rachele Ruii on the list of *Fratelli d'Italia* (II2, 2025).” This passage demonstrates that these individuals share the same ideological values and have personal connections: private links between movement and politics are employed to firmly embed opposition to voluntary termination of pregnancy within the Italian public sphere and political decision-making.

Furthermore, these new tactics are characterized by a distinctive element of extremism. The procedural radicalism of the new anti-abortion movements, such as **ProVita e Famiglia**, is demonstrated by their connections with the far-right political party *Forza Nuova*: “There are links that have also been exposed in Italy. So there are links with *Forza Nuova*. But if we look at recent times, there have been some elections in the regions of Italy, for example in Umbria, and we have seen the signing of the anti-choice manifesto by the candidates of the center. So they are expanding from extreme right to right, to the right, to the center. In the anti-abortion movement there are also exponents of the liberal right, *Forza Italia*, which is the party that was of Berlusconi. Despite the daughter of Berlusconi, who is very much loved by those who follow *Forza Italia*, publicly said that the rights are important, and she feels almost more left-wing than right-wing for the approach (I9, 2025).” This radical activism was confirmed by a journalistic investigation conducted in December 2024. In this investigation, published by the daily *Domanieditoriale*, journalists Simone Alliva and Stefano Vergine revealed that **ProVita e Famiglia** received funding and engaged in financial transactions with the neo-fascist Italian political party *Forza Nuova*, amounting to nearly €320 million over nine consecutive years. They also shared real estate properties used for the political activities of this party (Alliva, S. & Vergine, S., 2024, 5 December).

This connection between radical political affiliations and anti-abortion actors is far from new, as one interviewee noted: “During the Berlusconi era, synergies with conservative movements existed, but such themes were not central to political discourse. Today, however, parties such as the Lega and *Fratelli d'Italia* have adopted these issues more explicitly, sharing with movements like *ProVita* both communicative and political strategies, notably a populism that invokes an abstract, undefined people. This shift reflects the post-Berlusconi transformation of the Italian right, where his decline opened space for new actors to consolidate power by centering moral conservatism and identity politics (III, 2025).”

This movement-politics linkage enables the ideological and non-scientific instrumentalization of voluntary abortion: a manipulation operation that endangers democratic principles in Italy, such as transparency, respect for fundamental freedoms, and the separation of powers, which are undermined by fascist and populist doctrines present in the current legislature and the aforementioned party *Forza Nuova*, converging with the interests of private anti-abortion associations. This remarkable alliance raises critical questions regarding the democratic stability of the Italian state.

Therefore, this political-movement phenomenon has a tangible impact on the accessibility and exercise of voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy. The emergence of these strategies and dynamics has particularly severe repercussions for women and individuals seeking to obtain and exercise their right to abortion in Italy: *“women do not exist, gestating people do not exist; what they obsessively focus on is the foetus, as if everything else, as if the same person who contains that foetus did not exist at all (I12, 2025).”* Furthermore, according to some of the interviewed people, a substantial proportion of women must travel sometimes more than 100 kilometres to have the capacity and opportunity to choose and make decisions regarding their bodies and the trajectory of their social and economic futures. This variation largely depends on external factors unrelated to the abortion procedure itself: *“It depends a lot on the regions. This applies to all aspects of public and private health. In Italy there is the so-called leopard print regarding the standards and the application (I5, 2025).”*

Regional political authorities and medical actors occupy a central role in the practical accessibility of voluntary termination of pregnancy. Its availability varies depending on their ideological and moral approaches to the issue. Consequently, abortion is no longer solely a matter of public health; it has become a cultural war, shaped by interests and personal or doctrinal interpretations. In sum, the scientific integrity of the medical practice of abortion has been progressively undermined over time, both by the transformation of anti-abortion movement strategies, the integration of political influence, and the persistent practice of conscientious objection among medical professionals.

The conclusion of the 2010s–2020s period of interaction between Italian political actors and anti-abortion movements can be summarized by the following excerpt: *“Within both the government and the parliamentary majority, numerous figures are directly linked to the anti-choice movement, advancing initiatives such as legal recognition of the unborn, maternity income for women carrying pregnancies to term, foetal cemeteries, and even the establishment of a ‘day of the unborn’ (I12, 2025).”* A series of strategies was systematically incorporated into the action repertoires of anti-abortion movements thanks to their connections with political

power. These strategies largely continued prior initiatives, including the promotion of maternity and the stigmatization of women seeking voluntary termination of pregnancy.

An interviewee further articulated the operationalization of these strategies and repertoires during this period: *“When united, working on content and reasoning facilitates convergence across positions and draws attention from decision-makers at national and regional levels. We frame our proposals as a dialogue with leaders, informed by diverse experiences, and offer this approach inclusively, recognizing exceptions within the centre-left without following a rigid process (I10, 2025).”* This mode of operation clarifies the continuous exchange between these movements and the political sphere. The institutionalization and professionalization of the strategies and action repertoires of anti-abortion movements is evident: they are present both in public and political spheres and have been initiated on multiple occasions by political authorities and their representatives.

On one hand, institutionalization is illustrated by the embedding of political representatives within anti-abortion events, and conversely, by institutional initiatives that formalize anti-gender and anti-abortion ideas and values within public and political debates. This development not only transforms the common and popular conceptualization of voluntary termination of pregnancy but also allows legal and official recognition and support of norms and values opposing gender ideology and theory. Historically, Catholic anti-abortion movements, aligned with Vatican action repertoires and previously spontaneous strategies, have transformed into organized pro-life actors, anti-abortion and anti-gender, with a formalized guiding trajectory, legalized ideology, and carefully managed strategies.

On the other hand, the innovation and professionalization of this period are rooted in the adoption of strategies and action repertoires with radical and demagogic characteristics, openly interacting with political power and reformulating their substance. These traditionally Catholic anti-abortion actors have transformed into extra-ecclesiastical political actors and lobbies, employing skilled contamination and contagion strategies in both public and political arenas to guarantee the “right to life.” Consequently, abortion is no longer merely a societal issue: it has become a moral-political question and a cultural war, dividing the Italian nation.

Furthermore, several successive events validate and formalize the professionalization and institutionalization of Italian anti-abortion actors. This is demonstrated by the support of the Italian government, which is not only dogmatic but also operational, providing substantial measures and direct funding to anti-abortion associations and medical centres. Indeed, between 2023 and 2025, the Italian political authorities repeatedly subsidized various local anti-abortion associations with public funds, aiming to restrict abortion at the core of its practice. More

specifically, this occurred in the regions of Piedmont and Lombardy, where public institutions established regional funds designed to support “difficult pregnancies,” which evolved into instruments for financing anti-abortion movements, namely the *Fondo Vita Nascente* (Pennelli, F., 2025, 22 August). These state subsidies translated into the underfunding, and sometimes direct penalization, of hospitals and medical facilities performing abortions, while conversely increasing support for healthcare sites aligned against the provision of voluntary pregnancy termination. The magnitude of these economic supports is noteworthy.

The most recent event exemplifying the entrenchment of anti-abortion movements within the political landscape is illustrated by two attached iconographies. On one hand, the second edition of the “**Festival of the Human**,” organized by **MpV**, and on the other, a meeting of seven older white men discussing women’s bodies and abortion. The festival epitomizes the Italian government’s endorsement of anti-abortion actors. Indeed, this event was funded by the Ministry of Culture, supported through a letter from Giorgia Meloni, and attended by numerous representatives of the current Italian government during a week-long conference on “the human being,” reiterating their alignment with the ideology of life defence, implicitly targeting abortion (Suitetti.org, 2025, 20 June).

Regarding the assembly of white men, including representatives from the political party *Fratelli d’Italia*, their meeting focused on establishing a listening centre at the Sant’Anna Hospital in Turin to inform and sensitize women and pregnant persons on the process and physical and psychological consequences of abortion, marked by ideological interventions (Gribaudo, C., 2025, 8 July).

These two recent occurrences reaffirm the visible symbiosis between the Italian political authorities and contemporary anti-abortion actors: this complementarity underscores the institutionalization and professionalization of these social movements. While they may appear anecdotal or secondary within the broader empirical analysis, they are crucial, as they testify to the normalization of these political practices and the standardization of strategies and actions of anti-abortion movements within the public sphere and political debates.

To complement this subsection of our empirical analysis, it is pertinent to recall a concrete fact that provides an even more critical understanding of this period. Indeed, the Italian government and Ministry of Health published the report for the year 2022 on the implementation of Law 194/78 concerning voluntary termination of pregnancy only in December 2024. This substantial delay underscores the limited priority that this government accords to abortion: the data remain imprecise and outdated. The same applies to the development of an official national mapping rigorously referencing hospital centers where

voluntary termination of pregnancy is performed, which nevertheless exists under the designation **Punti IVG regionali, Progetto CCM 2022** (Cirant, E., 2024, December 3).

Consequently, the **2010s–2020s** period reflects a profound transformation, a radical change, and a lasting metamorphosis of the strategies and organizational model of Italian anti-abortion movements, now institutionalized and professionalized as **neo-Catholic and neo-fascist actors**. Collective actions such as the *Marche per la Vita*, *Manifestazione per Tutti*, the Family Days, the World Congress of Families, and Meloni's legislature represent the mobilizing events that have enabled these actors to gather, federate, and create a resilient and competent activist network, resisting the "colonization" of Italian society by gender ideology and safeguarding the natural complementarity of biological sexes. These anti-abortion neo-Catholic and neo-fascist Italian movements actively and openly participate in public debates and political processes, thereby reinforcing masculine hegemony and perpetuating entrenched cultures of misogyny and sexism, predominantly upheld by older, white, and privileged men.

Through their strategies and discourses, they systematically seek to exclude women, Black, and queer perspectives from discussions regarding abortion, aiming to maintain the societal order and the natural structural state of Italy. As for Italian politics and the government, they are, by essence, insidious. Institutional frameworks can be characterized as a policy of impunity, no longer grounded in the needs of citizens but rather aligned with the specific political ambitions of actors sympathetic to anti-abortion strategies. Intimacy and sexuality are regulated: any divergence or deviation from the legally established definitions of bodies is punished and sanctioned. Private life is subsumed into citizenship, oscillating between inclusion and exclusion, subject to adoption or revocation at any moment if it fails to comply with the state-sanctioned model.

Ultimately, the existence and operationalization of these strategies by Italian anti-abortion movements confirm the ongoing violence and discrimination inherent in a masculine, patriarchal society and public health system toward anyone exercising the right to abortion. Furthermore, these political and mobilization repertoires aim to erase women and women-centered issues from public spaces and public health, rendering them politically and socially marginalizable.

A final crucial point to address in this empirical analysis concerns the European scale of strategies and action repertoires of anti-abortion actors. Indeed, beyond the Italian context, there is a notable interest in the European level and scope among the European actors interviewed. In fact, an Italian anti-abortion actor confirmed the existence of a European agenda aimed at dismantling the right to access abortion and restoring the natural and biological order

of the human species: *“our biggest battle today is precisely this, to emerge this European manifesto in which many nations are asking for prudence with a propaganda that is ruining the lives of many children, young people and families (I6, 2025).”*

This European network, with an observatory located in Bioretika (Tuscany), reportedly enabled the launch of a European manifesto: *“has given life to a European manifesto that we have imported from France and Belgium, which have spread here in Italy (...) our biggest battle today is precisely this, to emerge this European manifesto in which many nations are asking for prudence with a propaganda that is ruining the lives of many children, young people and families.”* The recognition of this agenda can appear unprecedented and even perplexing: *“when we discovered its presence at the European level, but at the time it seemed almost like political science fiction (I6, 2025).”*

This European agenda seeks to restore the natural order of society and the biological complementarity of the sexes through mobilized actions and strategies driven by a radicalism of action and a modern Catholic religious extremism. The evolution of action models and repertoires of anti-abortion movements corresponds to the two-stage model described in the introduction of this section, namely, the phased implementation of their strategies. First, these strategies are implemented at the local, national, and international levels. Second, the recognition and certification of this European agenda allow this battlefield against abortion to materialize and operationalize through the deployment of these new strategies.

This interview excerpt confirms the existence of an informal network of exchanges, both online and in-person, between various political and institutional bodies and European anti-abortion movements. Their common goal is the gradual and systematic dismantling of social and economic rights, such as abortion, on a broader European scale, emerging in a socio-economic and politico-diplomatic context marked by ambient populism and resurgent conservatism.

In conclusion, the evolution of anti-abortion movement strategies confirmed my first hypothesis, more specifically here in this subsection, my third hypothesis. This section can be summarized, empirically, by the following statement: *“this is not about a genuine concern for life, but rather a geopolitical project that exploits pre-existing religious ideas to secure easy consensus. Behind it there may be political interests or individuals who want to impose their convictions on others, regardless of the democratic will (I12, 2025).”*

5.3. Discursive Evolution and Reconfiguration Frames

Discursive framings constitute an underlying component of my analysis of the evolution of strategies of Italian anti-abortion movements. They are fundamentally integrated into this empirical analysis of the action repertoires of these actors, serving as an intrinsic and underlying element of their mobilization. These framings reflect the specific representation of abortion as understood by Italian anti-abortion actors and their conceptualizations. In the following three subsections, we will examine how the embodiment and modelling of a societal issue, such as abortion, are transformed considering a specific shaping and particular orientation of public discourse, sometimes political language, and propaganda.

5.3.1. 1970s-1980s: Catholic Morality and the Sacredness of Life

Originally, the discursive framings of historical and traditional anti-abortion movements aligned with the dogmatic, semantic, and axiological directives and recommendations of the Vatican. Their initial discursive framing, embodied at the time by the **MpV**, aimed to address abortion from the perspective of traditional moral and religious values. Abortion was understood to undermine the primary moral foundations of the heterosexual, heteronormative family, composed of a father, a mother, and children. Accordingly, this societal issue was seen as transgressing the original order of the functioning of patriarchal Italian society and the maternal role assigned to women through motherhood. It was perceived as violating the duty to carry a child, give birth, and care for and educate that child. The unique and intimate bond between newborn and mother was considered broken, as reflected in multiple speeches by the **MpV**. Indeed, this initial discursive framing of abortion was evident in the language employed by this actor during the 1980 referendum campaign.

However, one interviewee went further than these traditional conceptualizations of abortion. This individual adopted a discursive framing distinct from that of the **MpV**. According to this anti-abortion interviewee, the year 1968 marked the beginning of a cultural revolution, inaugurating the gradual dismantling of Italian society through the legalization of abortion via Law 194 in 1978. Moreover, through this societal metamorphosis, the issue was no longer merely about recognizing the introduction of new rights, such as the legalization of divorce, contraception, or abortion; it became a class struggle and a sexual revolution characterized by the systematic destruction of the family and its values. This cultural upheaval produced a “*nihilistic*” society in which life was stripped of its inestimable value: “*we think about how to give death and how to die (...) Today, it is man or woman who decides whether to create a life or not. Life has no longer become a value that must be safeguarded at all costs.*”

Furthermore, this decomposition of Italian society and its prosperity proceeded as “a strategy that is a cultural path, as a way of thinking to try to spread a culture of life against the culture of death (abortion, divorce, euthanasia) (I7, 2025).”

This discursive framing, analyzing this period, is more focused on the axiological, ontological, and semantic dimensions of the values, morals, and languages symbolized by abortion. According to this framing, abortion embodies the culture of death, opposed to the stable and enduring culture of life upheld by the heterosexual and Catholic family model. Consequently, according to this understanding and interpretation of abortion, the actions and mobilizations of anti-abortion movements remain central and indispensable, as they act to restore the greatness of Italian society, symbolized by Catholic and familial values. This argument is supported by the following statement: *“we live in a culture of death, a nihilistic culture, so it is necessary to prospect a culture of life that respects human life from natural conception to natural death (I7, 2025).”*

The discursive framings present during the 1970s–1980s were enduring and continuous, primarily structured along the doctrinal trajectory and lineage of the Vatican regarding abortion in Italy. However, with certain nuances, indeed, the introduction of a moralizing, dichotomous, and traditional Catholic framing, anchored in the culture of life, refined the discursive framings characterizing abortion during this period. Overall, abortion was understood as an inherently evil and stigmatizing act, embodying the destruction of family and life, interpreted and mobilized by anti-abortion actors according to their propriety and interests.

5.3.2. 2000s-2010s: Rights-Based Discourse and Strategic Secularism

The 2000s–2010s represent a period of transition in the discursive framings employed by anti-abortion movements. Indeed, the evolution of the discursive strategies of Italian anti-abortion actors during this period was initiated by broader societal transformations, notably the rise of the internet and the digital space-time continuum: *“advertising campaigns have expanded dramatically. Posters and slogans are carefully designed to trigger emotional reactions, often through shocking or manipulative images, but they frequently spread scientifically inaccurate messages. To this, one must add political support: parties have ridden these strategies to shape public opinion and gain consensus (I9, 2025).”* Discursive framings were thus redefined through this digital dimension of communication and interaction. This represents a first key aspect in the evolution of the discursive strategies employed by Italian anti-abortion actors.

The primary anti-abortion actor active at the beginning of the 2000s was the **MpV**. Historically, it followed the guiding axis of the Vatican concerning abortion, a traditional Catholic red thread, adopting a conventional discursive framing. This discursive prism focused on the sanctity of life from conception. This doctrinal and dogmatic tradition constructed an axiological and semantic understanding of abortion grounded in an absolute, predominant moral order, situating it within a civilizational and comparative perspective akin to that of murder. However, following the **Lexicon of Ambiguous and Controversial Terms on Life, Family, and Ethical Issues in 2003** and the **Second Vatican Episcopal Conference in 2007**, this discursive configuration underwent renewal. The deployment of a new grammar and linguistic coding, oriented against gender theory and the ideology of gender, a concept developed by the Vatican, has now redefined the historical framing of anti-abortion movements and their strategies.

In this new discursive arrangement, gender is framed as the destruction of man and of Italian civilization, in other words, a new enemy, while simultaneously obscuring the scandals related to sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. The **MpV** follows and integrates this transformation by producing a lexicon increasingly focused on emphasizing the perceived dangers of gender theory and the principles of bodily self-determination and choice, feminist values reaffirmed through successive waves of the movement, particularly regarding abortion. The adoption of this new discursive framing is confirmed by the anti-abortion actors themselves, as illustrated in the following excerpt, demonstrating a shift in axiological and semantic orientation: *“We are encouraged by the Magisterium of Escovi and the Holy See to re-engage with reason and reflection in a world often dominated by power. While norms shape collective mentality, the deeper challenge is anthropological: to discern which conception of the human is more reasonable. When self-determination prevails in a ‘culture of waste,’ fragility is devalued and relationships severed. By contrast, recognizing desire and meaning cultivates bonds (...) This perspective affirms the intrinsic value of care and attention, offering our era an extraordinary opportunity to cultivate greater humanity (I10, 2025).”*

Consequently, gender is progressively mobilized by certain religious institutions and social movements as an instrument of fear, instilling artificial anxiety among the populace. This anxiety is accompanied by the promise of restoring the greatness of a patriarchy considered both historical and natural, symbolized by the ideal of a heterosexual family and the exaltation of traditional values associated with family and life. This narrative simultaneously serves to guide and control public opinion, providing a cause for which the population may be willing to mobilize, while also fuelling populist and fascist dynamics within the political sphere.

This dynamic is manifested within the **MpV** through the implementation of campaigns and petitions aimed at opposing the introduction of sexual education in schools, such as the Premio Internazionale ‘Alessio Solinas,’ perceived as a vector of gender theory. The decade 2000–2010 marks a first discursive turning point for Italian anti-abortion movements, which reconceptualize abortion as a component of gender theory, seen as a new feminist ideology capable of threatening the natural and social order. This generates anti-gender discursive framing, characterized by the resurgence of populism and fascism.

5.3.3. 2012-2024: Anti-Gender Ideology and Populist Neocatolicism

This turning point and the evolution of discursive framings, used by anti-abortion movements as instruments and strategies, are confirmed over the **period 2012–2024**. Indeed, the emergence of numerous new associations within the field of anti-abortion actors demonstrates a clear willingness to join this struggle and the dissemination of an anti-gender ideology. This ideology, carried by the new discursive framing, aims to promote and implement a patriarchal and neo-Catholic Italian and European agenda, publicly championed by these anti-gender actors but fundamentally centred on opposition to abortion.

This obsession with combating “**gender theory**” redefines the discursive framing of traditional and neo-Catholic anti-abortion movements, which now revolves not only around the defence of family values but also around the protection of life from conception and in its entirety. According to this conceptualization, the very essence of life is threatened by the legal existence of abortion in Italy. The following excerpt confirms the consolidation of this new discursive framing by the anti-abortion actors analyzed and interviewed: *“From 2011–2012, we observed the emergence of gender ideology in Italy, particularly through numerous complaints from parents in the province of Rome. At the time, the phenomenon was largely unknown, with minimal coverage limited to Giuliano Ferrara’s publication in Il Foglio and select online discussions. Following requests from families, we established an association to defend parents’ educational prerogatives, supported by writers and scientific and political figures investigating gender. This initiative coincided with Pope Francis’s warning that gender represented ideological colonization and that children should not be subject to experimental approaches (I6, 2025).”*

However, one interviewee nuances this theological approach, as shown in the following excerpt: *“They become obsessed with life being a conception without any scientific backup to that. And whenever you want to talk about science, they will bring up religion and try to sidetrack the conversation. And they have been very successful in doing that and making people*

feel guilty about their morals and consciences. Just creating this kind of space, heaven for people to openly hate women who have abortions, just because their religion allows them to do that. So yes, I think that's the most important pivot on the pro-life movement in the last few decades, just like misusing religious discourse to defend their positions (I8, 2025)."

As this passage shows, this new focus does not rely in any way on scientific evidence capable of substantiating the discursive framing. Rather, it constitutes a narrative structured around the private and political interests of Italian anti-abortion movements, aiming to insert themselves more broadly into public and institutional debates, as well as to influence cultural mentalities and representations surrounding abortion in Italy; *"From an evolutionary perspective, life is protected not only biologically but also culturally, raising society's awareness to overcome the 'culture of death' in favor of a culture of life. The strategy is to change mentalities, with Pro-Life movements uniting in common action, not merely to inform, but because it is morally right. No human being, whether in pain, nearing death, or elderly, should be killed (I7, 2025)."* This excerpt demonstrates that the new discursive framing goes beyond a mere redefinition of abortion in Italy: it also seeks to transform mentalities more broadly, orienting them toward a consensus around a culture of life.

Therefore, the following excerpt nuances the impact of the mobilization of these discursive framings, showing that they can sometimes reinforce and legitimize the discourses of far-right political parties in the public and political spheres: *"The far-right's increasing use of religious language and anti-choice arguments has pushed the pro-choice movement to adopt faith-based discourse, which was previously secular. Abortion debates once focused on health and personal decision-making, but today, responding to biblical arguments is necessary to remain effective. The pro-life movement has thus become sharply conservative, blending Christian nationalism in ways that were largely absent before (I8, 2025)."*

Nevertheless, between 2012 and 2024, new anti-abortion actors emerged, accompanied by political reforms and initiatives, such as the adoption of the **PNRR** decree, which satisfied these movements by legitimizing their presence in healthcare facilities and their discursive framings. This allowed them to realize part of their political agenda through tangible measures. However, the legitimacy and relevance of these framings can again be nuanced, particularly regarding their presence in healthcare facilities, as the following excerpt illustrates: *"Conversely, there exists a narrative suggesting that the presence of these actors in healthcare facilities is necessary to eliminate socio-economic, particularly financial, obstacles that might lead someone to choose to terminate a pregnancy. This narrative, however, is untenable: structural issues such as housing insecurity or precarious employment require systemic*

governmental measures, not occasional gifts like diapers, strollers, or formula, which cannot provide the stability needed to plan a pregnancy (I12, 2025).”

In practice, the discursive framings of anti-abortion movements underwent a profound transformation over the 2012–2024 period. Traditional Catholic axiology and semantics, initially aligned with the Vatican’s guiding line, gradually gave way to a lexicon and grammar centered on anti-gender ideology, also promoted by the same actors. Among the anti-abortion actors analyzed, several currents of discursive framing coexist within the movement. On the one hand, more traditional currents perceived gender theory as a new threat to Western civilizations. On the other hand, more extreme currents align themselves with far-right political values. Finally, as for the radical currents, their discursive framing, with a civilizational scope, primarily aims to transform mentalities and the culture surrounding abortion. Consequently, the analysis of these three subsections serves to corroborate my second hypothesis.

6. Synthesis: Comparative Findings Across the Three Periods and the Four Italian Anti-Abortion Associations

To gain a comprehensive understanding of my empirical analysis of the evolution of anti-abortion movement strategies, I have decided to construct a diachronic table that traces the transformation of these strategies across the three periods under study (1970s–2020s).

Table 3. A Diachronic Analysis of Strategy Shifts within Italian Anti-Abortion Movements (1970s–2020s)

	Strategies of anti-abortion actors
1970s-1980s	<p>Creation of a conventional anti-abortion actor and traditional mobilisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of MpV • Mobilization against Law 194 and the referendum of 1981
1990-2010s	<p>Religious initiative (Vatican) of transforming the strategies and discursive framework around abortion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First episcopal conference of 1997 • Lexicon of Ambiguous and Controversial Terms on Life, Family, and Ethical Issues in 2003 • Second Episcopal Conference of 2007 • First Family Day of 2007 <p>Progressive metamorphosis of MpV into a professional anti-abortion actor through the creation of external actors supporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MpV : creation of Comitato Verità e Vita, Scienza & Vita, Forum delle Famiglie. Mobilization through Comitato Verità, volunteer actions
2010s-2020s	<p>The creation of new associations based on the gender ideology and an extra-ecclesiastic mobilisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2012 March for Life • Creation of ProVita e Famiglia (2013)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of NonSiToccalaFamiglia (2014) • Creation of IlPopoloDellaFamiglia (2016) <p>Huge Anti-gender, anti-abortion, and Anti-queer mobilizations, transnational character</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • La Manif pour Tous Italia (2015) • The two Family Days of 2015 and 2016 <p>The process of visible institutionalization and professionalization through direct political lobbying and financing support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The World Congress of Families in Verona (2019) • The 2022 Meloni Legislature (PNRR decree)
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Furthermore, the empirical analysis of the evolution of anti-abortion movement strategies has revealed a continuum in their repertoires of action and discursive framings. Nevertheless, it appeared essential to me to disentangle and highlight the strategic and mobilizing specificities of each Italian anti-abortion actor under examination. This is illustrated in the comparative table below.

Table 4. Comparative Overview of Italian Anti-Abortion Movements: Strategic Orientations, Discursive Framings, Sources of Funding, and Political Affiliations

	Strategies	Discursive framework	Financing	Political Affiliation
Movimento per la Vita Onlus (MpV – 1975) President - Marina Casini Bandini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Sos Vita’ helpline • ‘Centro di Aiuto alla Vita’ (CAV, Center 	Traditional and Catholic discourse on the protection of life/human in the womb, and the nuclear family.	Private donation	Direct support of the current government, different ministers present are at their event (the Festival of

	<p>for Life Assistance), providing support to pregnant women facing difficult circumstances; in other words, a form of social aid consisting of €200 per month</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fondazione Vita Nova supports the strategies and the doctrine • “Giornata per la Vita” 	<p>Recognized for following the Vatican trajectory on this issue.</p>		<p>Human), letter and discourse of Giorgia Meloni, admiring their actions.</p> <p>Close and Discrete relationship with the institutional powers, conference in a Senate room on the human and defence of life</p> <p>Close relationship with Christian and Vatican ecclesiastic institutions.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaigns, information, and events • Political Lobbyism 			
ProVita e Famiglia Onlus (2012) President – Toni Brandi Spokeperson – Jacopo Coghe National spokesperson – Maria Rachele Ruiiu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very active Mobilisation extra-ecclesiastic: choking campaign, posters, and videos • Strikes (Marcia per la Vita, Family Day) • Campaigns, petitions, and legal propositions 	Anti-gender discourses Populist and neo-catholic speeches	Private Donation	Affiliations with political parties identified by scholars as belonging to the radical right and far-right spectrum, including Fratelli d'Italia and Forza Nuova. Will to implement themselves at the European level. Significant media and political coverage.

	ons for the institutio nal power			
NonSiToccaLa famiglia (2014) President – Giusy D’Amico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform and educate the school about gender ideology, its consequences, and an anti-gender education campaign, in other words • Organizing a congress on the theme of family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-gender discourses • Moderate Nuclear family protection specifically on the children and the family – traditional discourses 	Private Donation	Link with CitizenGo regarding a political proposal, Link with the Government of Meloni

<p>Il Popolo della famiglia (2016)</p> <p>President – Mario Adinolfi</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislative proposition “Maternity Revenue” Participation in public and transnational events Electoral campaign supporting the political party of Giorgia Meloni indirectly Professionalization of the anti-abortion mobilisation into 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publication of an anti-abortion book, through a religious, political, and anti-gender spectrum Dictionary of the natural and normal principle 	<p>Private Donation</p>	<p>Direct support from Giorgia Meloni in her inaugural speech as President of the Council of Ministers of Italy.</p>
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	a concrete political project			
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By tracing the evolution of strategies among the four selected anti-abortion associations over time, these comparative tables enable us to both illustrate the strategic progression of these actors and highlight points of convergence, complementarity, and divergence. They thus offer a synthesized and nuanced depiction of the empirical analysis undertaken.

7. Conclusion

Voluntary termination of pregnancy has been largely legalized across Europe over the past fifty years. However, in parallel, the growth of pro-life movements and the increasing focus on gender issues and the nuclear family have been significant. This research aimed to reconstruct this complex landscape and specifically address the following research question: **“How have the strategies and discursive framings employed by Italian pro-life actors changed from the 1970s to the 2020s?”** Focusing on Italy as a case study, I hypothesized that these actors underwent a transformation and renewal of both strategies and rhetorical frameworks, reflecting shifts in their positions on the semantics and values associated with abortion, alongside a reorganization of their tactics in close interaction with Italian political institutions.

To answer this question, I adopted a complementary analytical methodology. I conducted sixteen semi-structured interviews (eight with pro-life actors and eight with pro-choice actors) and compiled a corpus of qualitative documents, including laws, referenda, videos, and speeches, as secondary and supplementary sources spanning 1978 to 2024.

First, I examined the institutionalization and professionalization of Italian pro-life actors through the evolution of their strategies and repertoires of action from the 2000s onward, corresponding to my initial hypothesis. Empirical data and qualitative analysis of the interviews nuanced this hypothesis. This professionalization became particularly evident in 2003 with the Vatican’s **Lexicon of Ambiguous and Controversial Terms on Life, Family, and Ethical Issues**, which introduced a new semantic and rhetorical framework regarding gender. This framework was reinforced during the second Episcopal Conference in 2007, which focused on gender theory, and initiated the professionalization of anti-abortion strategies with the **Family Day** in the same year. This event represented the first official mobilization of the Italian anti-abortion field, aiming to unite actors and standardize their repertoires of action and rhetorical framings. It marked the first pre-neo-catholic, extra-ecclesiastical, and explicitly anti-gender mobilization. The presence of political figures at this event and at certain movement congresses demonstrated the initial stages of institutionalization. This process continued from 2012 with the **March for Life**, which saw the emergence of new Italian anti-abortion actors, including **ProVita e Famiglia**, **NonSiToccaLaFamiglia**, and **IlPopolodellaFamiglia**, confirming their transformation. Institutionalization and public visibility were further consolidated with the **Verona Congress (2019)** and **Giorgia Meloni’s legislative term (2022)**, through the establishment of a shared political agenda among these actors. Consequently, Italian pro-life actors modified their traditional strategies, adopting a combined approach of political and legal

interventions to secure a lasting presence in the public sphere and political debates. Overall, based on this empirical and analytical evidence, my first hypothesis was confirmed: Italian pro-life actors have progressively professionalized and institutionalized since the early 2000s, demonstrating significant strategic and rhetorical evolution.

Secondly, by qualitatively examining my interviews and the corpus of analytical documents, I observed an evolution in the discursive framings of Italian anti-abortion movements regarding voluntary termination of pregnancy. Indeed, following the legalization of abortion in 1978 and up until the creation of a new lexicon by the Vatican in 2003 and the second Episcopal Conference in 2007, these actors employed a discourse that was primarily religious, conservative, and moral, aligning with the doctrinal dogmas of the Vatican. Voluntary termination of pregnancy was thus defined as murder, destroying the essence of divinely inspired life, morally stigmatizing those who underwent it. Following the creation of the **Lexicon of Ambiguous and Controversial Terms on Life, Family, and Ethical Issues** in 2003, these original discursive framings gradually evolved into an anti-gender semantic and axiological framework constructed in opposition to gender ideology. Paradoxically, this shift was based on a grammar created by ecclesiastical authorities, from which these new actors sought to distance themselves. Consequently, abortion came to be conceptualized as the expression of the destruction of Western civilization, representing the culture of death, seeking to put an end to the sanctity of life and the nuclear family model.

Furthermore, the realization of this discursive, axiological, and semantic transformation of anti-abortion actors' discourse occurred between 2012 and 2024, due to several factors: the evolution of communication channels, increased media coverage, the emergence of new actors inherently opposed to gender theory, and alignments with political actors such as **Forza Nuova**, who shared these strategies and, at times, more radical and extreme ideas. More broadly, through the implementation of these new framings, anti-abortion movements now aim to transform cultural and moral representations, as well as societal attitudes regarding abortion in Italy. In summary, considering all these elements, my second hypothesis is confirmed.

Finally, the essence of my research is grounded in **M. Prearo's (2023) theory of Neo-Catholicism**, which I therefore applied to my empirical analysis. Neo-Catholicism synthesizes the resurgence of Italian anti-abortion movements. This new Neo-Catholic essence is decisive in transforming the organizational structures and ideologies of these actors. The epicentre of this shift is evidenced by the **March for Life (2012)**, which confirms the strategic logics of contamination and diffusion, intrinsically extra-ecclesiastical and anti-gender. Mobilizations

are now multiple, broad, and heterogeneous, allowing extensive promotion, legitimation, and visibility in public and political spheres.

Moreover, the expansion of their strategic mobilizations and discursive grammars integrates and confirms the ongoing, intimate exchange between political parties and anti-abortion social movements, including political discourse at anti-abortion events and institutional funding. In other words, Italian anti-abortion movements have now become Neo-Catholic political actors, combining Catholic tradition with populist and far-right political dynamics in their strategies and discursive framings, thereby confirming the third hypothesis examined.

This thesis has demonstrated the evolution and transformation of strategies, repertoires of action, and discursive framings of Italian anti-abortion movements between 1978 and 2024. More specifically, it has highlighted a connection between this metamorphosis and the increasing interaction between political institutions and Italian anti-abortion movements, particularly with radical-right and far-right political parties. I argue that this shift in strategies and discursive framings, Neo-Catholic, and anti-gender, constitutes a key factor explaining their alignment with the radical right in Italy.

This research contributes to the limited scholarly literature on counter-movements, culture wars, and moral politics by focusing on Italian anti-abortion movements. Furthermore, it aimed to address the scientific gap concerning the evolution of anti-abortion movement strategies and the obstacles to voluntary termination of pregnancy in Italy.

However, this research has several limitations and potential biases. First, the formulation of my research question presupposes the existence of a phenomenon, which it seeks only to verify and demonstrate. Second, my methodology and empirical investigation rely on a substantial number of semi-structured interviews, which inherently frame respondents' understanding of the phenomenon in a particular way. Moreover, this methodology is fundamentally qualitative, prioritizing the narratives of interviewees rather than combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Nevertheless, the multiplicity and diversity of interviews allowed for a comprehensive empirical analysis of this critical phenomenon, supplemented by secondary sources from the corpus of qualitative documents. Third, the decision to limit the empirical analysis to four Italian pro-life actors, **MpV**, **ProVita e Famiglia**, **NonSiToccaLaFamiglia**, and **IlPopolodellaFamiglia**, constrains the generalizability of the findings to the broader Italian anti-abortion landscape, while also excluding the specificity of local and regional mobilizations. Nevertheless, this approach enables an understanding of the evolution of strategies and repertoires of action of the most prominent actors in both public and political spheres. Fourth,

the study's focus on a single national case, Italy, allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within this specific national framework, contributing to the construction of European trends in anti-abortion movements while highlighting national particularities. Accordingly, to broaden the scope, it would be pertinent in future research to adopt a comparative European perspective, to determine whether a similar generalized evolution exists across Europe or, conversely, to highlight the distinctiveness of the Italian context.

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9. Annexes

9.1. Interviews Transcription

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Interview Guide on the Evolution of the Italian Pro-Life Movements and Actors (1970s-2020s)



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Table of Contents

1. Interview n°1	3
2. Interview n°2	4
3. Interview n°3	7
4. Interview n°4	9
5. Interview n° 5	15
6. Interview n°6	22
7. Interview n°7	33
8. Interview n°8	41
9. Interview n°9	46
10. Interview n°10	51
11. Interview n°11	57
12. Interview n°12	69
13. Interview n°13	74
14. Interview n°14	78
15. Interview n°15	82
16. Interview n°16	83



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1. Interview n°1

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is to understand how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin? Do you consent to participate and be interviewed? YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion law, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

I'm familiar with the movement in all its, let's say, details. I know the idea, the ideal, but I don't know all of its, let's say, fringes and factions, so I don't express an opinion because I don't know this association in all its, let's say, characteristics well.

The law on abortion is an opportunity for women who find themselves in situations where they have to make choices and to be able to make them in a context that is safe and protected for their physical and mental health (...) but, let's say, before coming to this choice, as far as my work is concerned, I inform women to avoid finding themselves in this situation, so with contraception.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?
- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?
- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

For decades, I do not know which strategies, I do not know the pro-life movement in its details. I know what the idea is, but I do not know all of its, let's say, nuances. Wait, let's see if I can help you, let's say that I am (...) in which. "I don't know the strategies, so I don't know how they have influenced. Okay, yes, do you have any other opinions that you'd like to share on the topic? No, what I told you, that in my opinion, it is obvious that abortion is a choice that is, let's say, not easy, and for which the only intervention that can be made is to prevent reaching the point of having to make this choice, so it is with information and contraception that it can be achieved,



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meaning the ease of, let's say, having the opportunity to use contraceptives, both hormonal and barrier, which can obviously prevent finding oneself in this situation, so it is prevention.

2. Interview n°2

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is to understand how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin? Do you consent to participate and be interviewed? YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

The law 194 of 1978, as I explain in my book *Against Abortion* (Youcanprint, 2023), should not be understood as a "law on abortion". One need only look at the Official Gazette in edition 140 dated May 22, 1978, and see the title of that regulation: "Norms for the social protection of motherhood". The first paragraph of article 1 of the law is even clearer: "The State guarantees the right to conscious and responsible procreation, recognizes the social value of motherhood, and protects human life from its beginning". The voluntary interruption of pregnancy is introduced in the title of the regulation and then in the second paragraph of article 1, immediately warning of the danger that it may be used as a tool for limiting births, and at no point does the law define abortion as a "right".

It is simply decriminalized under certain precise conditions.

Unfortunately, the media drumbeats and certain ideological interests have transformed law 194 into a sort of club of the "right to abortion". In this sense, the change in Italian customs with the introduction of the law has been profound, leading to the paradox of the vast media attention given in February 2025 to the statement by parliament member Gilda Sportiello, who called the day of abortion "the most beautiful day of her life".

From abortion as a social stigma, there has even been a shift to abortionism first as an ideology to be flaunted in the arena of "new rights" that is indelible, and then even as a source of pride and satisfaction. All this occurs within a framework of progressive demographic freeze, with a



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gigantic problem of declining birth rates that will soon put the entire Italian welfare system in crisis. The effects of the ideological rhetoric built around the law are therefore, on one hand, grotesque, and on the other, dramatic.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

The pro-life movement in Italy is very weak and more divided into factions with very different sensitivities. Il Popolo della Famiglia has a directly political approach to the issue and argues, based not only on my writings but also on the congress documents always linked to my election as party president, that only a direct approach asking for electoral support for a programmatic platform that includes a commitment to the defense of unborn life can counter the spread of abortion. The approach is the American one that, starting from a direct political battle, has led, as a result of electoral victories, to banning abortion in 21 American states after the Supreme Court overturned the 1973 Roe vs Wade ruling, which originated the idea of the "right to abortion." Other movements are completely absent from the political dialectic, while others prefer to carry out a sort of moral suasion in support of parties that would never include the option of overcoming abortion in their programs. These distinctions certainly cause divisions within the Italian pro-life movement.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

In the various decades, different strategies have been adopted by the Italian pro-life movement. In the 1980s, a confrontational approach was chosen against Law 194, materializing in the abrogative referendum of May 17, 1981, promoted by the Movement for Life. That day is often remembered only for the defeat of the question proposed by MpV, which nonetheless garnered over ten million votes in favor of the repeal of abortion. In reality, on that same day a question proposed by the panelists was also voted on, aiming to remove the limit to the twelfth week, effectively allowing abortion without limits. That question, however, was rejected by over twenty-seven million opposing votes.

It is important to recall this because the platform of the American Democrats in the 2024 presidential elections included a pro-abortion law up to the twenty-fourth week in all states, and in some, like Minnesota led by vice presidential candidate Tim Walz, the law allowing abortion without time limits was already in effect. In the 1980s and 1990s, the pro-life movement was thus able to benefit from a result that demonstrated considerable popular support for the anti-abortion idea. With the XXI century, that position gradually diminished, revitalizing suddenly thanks to the Family Day events of 2015-2016. Around that experience, more agile and less

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"institutional" pro-life movements emerged, from the People of the Family to Provita, which alongside other groups have strengthened a real associative galaxy that chose the overall strategy of a more massive media presence that did not exclude radical opposition to secularist positions. These positions were also reinforced by the very strong statements of Pope Francis, particularly that made on October 10, 2018, stating that "aborting is like hiring a hitman".

- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

The novelty of the radical conflict with the secularist abortion option has provoked a very violent reaction from such forces, which have attempted to limit the activities of the pro-life movement with heavy intimidation acts. Countless acts of vandalism have occurred, attempts to block conferences featuring anti-abortion representatives, and outright assaults on venues where texts opposing abortion were presented, including my own, with the intervention of dozens of law enforcement officers to quell such aggressive demonstrations. Paradoxically, all this violence has strengthened the determination of those involved in the pro-life movement, ensuring that this voice is now difficult to silence. There have also been small concrete victories, such as the presence of anti-abortion activists in counseling centers, which have been heavily contested, particularly by the feminist movement. In fact, we are in a moment of strong ferment for the pro-life reality, which is evolving and which especially needs to achieve full organizational unity to be more effective.



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3. Interview n°3

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

The first is how the law 194 on vote has influenced the current status of reproductive rights in Italy. It was a law. A law is needed because we women without a law, with nature and that's it, cannot be equal to other human beings. So we need the state of law, we need a law. When there shouldn't be a need, because if we take into consideration that males and females form the human gender, all genders should have the same rights. And as there is no need for a law to make a decision, I don't understand why there should be a need for a law to make a relationship. Because otherwise it's a double-edged sword. In any relationship, a woman cannot distinguish between science and the state of law if she enjoys her sexuality or not.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

I call it anti-abortion. Anti-abortion. They are anti-rights, they are people who speak because they have a mouth, for purely political reasons, because for themselves they would never do what they tell others to do. You can easily see their lives, how they position themselves, what families they have, to realise, but the propaganda goes on. It's a movement that comes from America, from the Evangelists, as Chomsky said. And so, well, financed, studied, on a small scale, for their political and economic reasons. They target people's bellies and people fall. I understand how they do it, but it always happens. And so, the anti-rights prosper.

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- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?
- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

Practically, the slogans they say are always the same, they don't change. Cassini, who was the government under the democracy of Christine, a traditional family, it's not that you have a man and a woman who go to a church of any colour. Families are created by themselves, and so if they intend to tradition that, you can also see Meloni, she has a daughter, she is single, but she speaks to others about what others should do, but not about what they do. For me, this is bullying, that's why I don't consider it a movement. Criminals are bullies.

The current problems, the main current problems concerning abortion in Italy, the problems of access... So, in Italy... In Italy, abortion is possible. There are obstacles. The obstacles that are placed are... to not have a map of which hospitals there are, with less objectives of consciousness, so what we ask is a map to know this, and to avoid obstacles, that doctors act according to their mandate, and what the World Health Organisation says.

So, the objective of consciousness, if it were a real objective of consciousness, it would be a little less than 10%, but a maximum of 11%, like any person who can have any religion, but as long as it is not an objective of consciousness, it is simply directed to the primary, or not wanting to do your job. So, with a map where you can know when and how and the precise procedures to be able to abort, because there are procedures, but people don't know them. And so, what is missing is information, a precise map, and then treating people for what they are, and not for containers or little machines of the distributors of money or children.



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4. Interview n° 4

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

So, Law 194 was a fundamental thing at the time, there was nothing before, so it was a very important battle, which also allowed feminism to gather around a common cause and to grow, in this sense, also in Italy, so it was a fundamental battle.

It is a law that, also in its title, recites norms in defence of maternity and the voluntary interruption of pregnancy. So, as they say, maternity is the normal thing that should happen. If something bad happens, there is a voluntary interruption of pregnancy, but it shouldn't necessarily be like that.

Over time, we have learned that women should not only reproduce, that is not their only purpose, and that the voluntary interruption of pregnancy can also be a choice and should simply be a medical care, a medical service that is offered and not necessarily a terrible thing that happens and causes pain. Of course, this can happen if a person wants a pregnancy, but also not.

So, Law 194 still has some old rules, in a way. It was also written 40 years ago, so it's ok. Many people, at this moment, comment, they ask if it is the case to change it or not. Let's say that the current state of things is such that there is so much debate around this law that, among other things, it seems that it allows horrible things, that is, to be able to kill children. It is not absolutely true.

It is one of the most restrictive laws in all of Europe and that simply allows to carry out this thing up to a certain week with a lot of protection. At this moment, thinking about changing it

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would be very risky because there are political forces on the field that would not even allow this for them. So, let's say that we have to keep it good, even if it has limits that maybe one day will be overcome.

Should the Italian government improve the law? I would try to frame it, I don't know how to say it in Italian, frame it, as there should be a right to the self-determination of the body, that is, to decide what to do with one's own body. This also extends, for example, to the right to an end to life. The famous assisted suicide.

Yesterday the first regional law on this topic was approved in the Tuscan region, which says that the region must essentially allow the end of life, the treatment of the end of life, which at the moment is not regulated at the national level. So, in my opinion, it should be framed in this way, also because there ideologically are many people against abortion, because many of them do not even have a uterus, so why should they have a word in the chapter? But many people agree for the end of life, so maybe it would also allow to discard some political polarisation that exists, that would allow to see the thing under the fact that it is a right to be able to choose on one's own body. Abortion is one of the cases in which you choose on your own body.

- What are today the main obstacles to accessing abortion in Italy, both from a legislative and a social point of view?

This is the first one. Even in regions like Emilia-Romagna, where I am based, which is a region where each province has a center where voluntary interruption of pregnancy is carried out, there are no structures where there is 100% conscious objection, so in all the structures it is possible to carry out abortions, but the structures are often very small. So, for example, what happens very often in our region, like in others, is that in the same room, in the same place, both pregnant women with the belly go there to have the baby checked, both women who want to abort and, as I said before, some of them certainly for their own choice and are lucky to have a family that supports them, so they don't have negative feelings.

Someone else may have to abort for problems, so keeping pregnant people together and people who have to go for abortion you would have to do two different rooms, or pharmacological abortion, so you ingest a pill in the office or in the medical structure and this leads you to have to go to the bathroom to take off the first part of the tissues that come off. The bathroom used by those who take the pill is the same one used by all people who go to the office or to the hospital, with the result that maybe there is a person who is peeing and you next to him are

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having an abortion, which is a process that has a physical effect, so you would have to have separate spaces and this is linked to the fact that the public health in Italy, even though it is better than in other countries, is very underprivileged. There is a limit since the Italian law is then passed through regional executive acts, depending on how the region is organised, then the acts are passed to local hospital companies, but since there is a strong independence of the regions on this, the Italian law is one, the regions then apply it as they prefer.

This means that on the one hand there is a lot of flexibility, for example in Emilia-Romagna it has now been allowed to carry out pharmacological abortion at home, so you don't even have to go to the hospital anymore, you can take the two pills you have to take at home.

On the other hand, however, in some regions, for example, a medical certificate is required to be able to access the abortion, this is not written in the law, but the law is vague and therefore allows each region to decide for itself, in other regions not, so maybe you live on the border between one region and the other, you have to ask for the certificate when it is not necessary and one last thing is that a 7-day break is required between the request for the certificate and the first access to the polyclinic, the hospital or the office.

This, in my opinion, in the period in which the voluntary interruption of pregnancy is allowed, which is therefore very early, so it is very rarely about people who would like to carry out a pregnancy, but who due to physical problems or birth cannot carry it out, it is an essentially useless break, also because it takes some time before the hospital welcomes you, so it is not that you make a request today and tomorrow you have the appointment, if you make a request today, the appointment will take a week, if you have to wait another week, it is two weeks, and since, for example, to access the pharmacological abortion. Not the surgical, there are more tight times, this may mean that sometimes those who could access the pharmacological abortion then have to do it surgically. The surgical is more invasive, and therefore this, let's say, then creates limited situations that would not exist if these 7 days were not planned.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

Good question! Good question, because I am currently based in Bologna, but I am from Modena, which is a city that is very, you have also seen with the pro-choice network, we are active there, and in Modena there is a strong anti-abortion movement, so they are very aggressive, and there they seem quite compact.



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I think there is a bit of a monopoly, in the sense that, fortunately, not all, because it is often associated the fact of being very religious, very catholic, with the fact of seeing abortion as a sin, the sacred life from the moment of conception, etc. Actually, thank God, there are also religious people who do not believe that abortion is a sin, so maybe it is so much a restricted group, but very numerous, that I see them as quite compact, but I admit that I have a very partial experience, so I don't know if this is generalisable to all of Italy, or to all of Europe, or to the world.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

So, for the experience that I have seen, they occupy the space, in our case in Modena, in front of the polyclinic, for, in theory, the 40 days of Lent, so always 40 days before Easter. Then these 40 days began to be repeated twice a year, once before Easter and once in November, so theoretically before Christmas, during the holidays. So they occupied the space in front of the polyclinic and what they did was to pray, essentially, to pray for the end of the abortion, with posters, they recited the Rosary and they spoke in a submissive way, but, in short, some people who passed by said that they heard that they continued to pronounce, to pray, essentially.

Someone referred us, but this is not a confirmed information, that we even tried to stop some people, asking them what they were doing, were you going to the office, but no, you didn't go, etc. This, let's say, is the first level out of the hospital, very scenic, but not much, essentially. Then they organised meetings, always in Modena, it was organised in November, during these 40 days, it was organised in a cell where they lit about 500 candles that had to symbolise the 500 souls of the children lost for the abortions.

Several agreements were organised, in this case, it is not always the same association that organises them, there is a big movement called 40 days for life, which is the international one, but together with this movement in the Italian territory there is also this association called Papa Giovanni XXIII, which does a thousand things, even beautiful, from a migrant mother to people in the conflict zone, but then it was decided that they would fight against this thing, so they organised events, for example one of the events was where they talked about the so-called uterine affliction, medically assisted procreation, maternal surrogacy, they described it clearly in a very negative way. They were also the authors of a communication campaign in which they represented children with a bar code on their faces, as if to say that children are not a commodity to be sold, they are not natural procreation, they are the city. So this is the second level of engagement.



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The third level is to mix with the institutions. A few months ago this big survey was published by *Giornale Domani*, which highlighted how strong the link between the Pro Vita movement and Forza Nuova, which is a political force of extreme right, promoted by the Parliament, thanks to God, they were very close, so they exchanged apartments, money exchanges, etc.

At the local level we see that to be part of the City Council some people are part of the Forky Days for Life movement or who have exposed themselves in the past on very strong positions publicly on the subject. And this also generates political debates, because for example in Modena a few weeks ago there was a City Council in which the mayor and the majority expressed criticism of these movements that were placed outside the polyclinic, asking them essentially to leave, even if unfortunately the law protects all kinds of demonstrations and therefore they cannot be kicked out, or it is difficult to kick them out with the current legislation. On the other hand, the oppositions have also criticised as members of these movements. So there are three levels of engagement from this point of view.

They are dangerous for different reasons. Clearly the third level, the one closest to the institutions, is the most powerful, because it has the power to change the laws, to make public initiatives, to use public funds to do things and generally who is at those levels, if you have seen tomorrow's survey, it is very rich people, with a lot of influence and a lot of money, so they can do whatever they want.

But on the other hand, for people who use public services, people who are not interested in politics, it is much more dangerous to see a demonstration in the centre with the lights on, because that clearly impacts them a lot and it is very scenographic, very visible. So I would say that they are all dangerous in their own way. Surely the third level is a little heavier.

- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

It's a good question, because I think the two like there is a general change on a political level and while before, I don't know, 7-8 years ago there was no discussion about the abortion rights, of course there were the goals of consciousness, the more you go back in time the more people were more religious, so there was another kind of culture. But on a political level there was a battle that was defended also from the right-wing and in the last years with the advent of the reactionary populism essentially and also in Italy with the advent of a very strong right-wing I think the way of telling the self-determination of the body has changed a lot. So paradoxically it has become easier to ask for the end of this right or not to be interested specifically, not to

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think that it is an important battle to preserve this right, maybe also because we have normalised it a bit, it is taken for granted to have access to this thing and therefore we don't give it so much attention.

So I don't know if the pro-life movement has actually made its strategies more aguerite or if the surrounding context has made them simpler. The fact is that in the last years we have noticed a lot this strong power from this movement and certainly also the fact that the 40 days for life movement is financed and supported by a larger network of movements all over the world, starting from the United States and in the United States there is a very strong with Trump, already from the first Trump let's say, maybe this too has had an influence. Maybe more mixed with the political context. Before it was a separate movement, it was something on its own that did its activities, certainly supported, as we have seen from the polls of tomorrow, the relations between 40 days for life and Forza Nuova lasted for a decade or so. There were already relations, but they were more under the bench, they should not be shown because it was not so organised that we could say we have to decide what to do with the body of others. Instead, perhaps at this moment it is more entrenched with politics.



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5. Interview n° 5

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?
- Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your professional background in reproductive health?
- What has been your specific experience in the field of abortion-related care?
- If so, in what ways have they manifested themselves, and what impact have they had on your work and on the patients?

The IED is the Italian Association for Demographic Education. It has been engaged for years in contraception, but also in the defence of abortion. The IED, through a disobedience of then President Luigi De Marchi, all these names can be traced, they can be useful for reconstruction, helped to cancel the contraception as a crime against the lineage, because the fascist code, the Rocco code, provided the prohibition of abortion contraception on the basis of the preservation of the lineage.

So it was an immediate experience, very, very engaging, and engaging not only from the professional point of view, but also from the point of view of commitment. I say one thing that often comes to mind, I heard an interview of a Belgian gynaecologist, I can also shoot the interview, but it was a few years ago, in which he said, I want to be able to do the IED, the abortions as a gynaecologist and not as a militant. This is significant.

The law in Italy is from 1978, so at the beginning I did the IED, we went to the hospitals where it was possible to do it. It took years to implement and still this integration of the application of the law is very variable. I have worked in very positive situations from this point of view, I think the spirit with which this confession is made is very important.

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Two things to underline, two really. One is that precisely for this reason, precisely because one must be very motivated, feel a need to do well, but this goes for everything, I am not so favourable, indeed I am not at all favourable, to the abolition of the possibility of doing the IED. Why? I don't want to do this, this medical procedure, because I am convinced of the problems of the IED, because attention, in Italy the IED is an IED of comfort.

I am the secretary of the FIAPAR, because I was also president of the FIAPAR, the International Federation of Abortion and Contraception Professionals. Also within the FIAPAR, this could be a reference, there are debates, I was in a session in a congress, of which I was part. The second thing, so I think this is an important concept for me, because it is usually generalised among abortion providers who seem to be pro-abortion.

This is not the case. Those who are concerned with delivery, I also wanted to say that I went to the hospital after the family planning in 1986, so obviously my professional action has expanded and I think this is also important. Speaking of pro-life, I remember a congress, I think it was in Berlin, I don't remember, of the FIAPAR, where there was a pro-life demonstration outside the congress. Usually we always had it. The only place where we didn't have it was Rome, but we had it in Edinburgh, we had it in Seville, they came with the buses. I remember there was a lady who was demonstrating with a child in her arms. I approached her and said, ma'am, I give birth to children too, so to put this performance in its right place, which is a performance of health, and where there is no permission, there is mortality and morbidity of women.

All the agencies recognise this, from the WHO to FIGO, which is the International Federation of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians, so the global one. So in my opinion, we can't ignore the fact that we are talking about a health issue, where reproductive health also includes the possibility of self-determination.

To be able to choose if you want to be a mother, when you want to be a mother, how many times you want to be a mother, this range of possibilities and self-determination is part of human rights, and reproductive health has been inserted by the WHO and by the various conferences on the population that dates back many years. And also in the conference on the population of Cairo, or rather in Tehran, which we are talking about, and in Beijing. Beijing is a fundamental stone. I think it is in Beijing that human rights emerged.

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So, to conclude my personal experience, I think that the interruption of pregnancy is part of the baggage of a professional who deals with gynaecology and osteoporosis, and how it happens for other things. For example, I dealt with endoscopy. Endoscopy means osteoscopy, laparoscopy, etc. This type of surgery, with a lot of love and passion. But not all gynaecologists do endoscopy. So, I am against the fact that abortion must be a special statute for which everyone must do it, while it is not written anywhere that everyone must do specialties like gynaecological oncology. Not everyone does gynaecological oncology. If I have a patient who needs an oncological intervention, I automatically send her to a place where she can deal with this problem. So, why shouldn't it be like this? Moreover, the Italian law provides for this, but it is never applied. Article 9, which regulates the objection of conscience, provides that the structure must guarantee the execution of the intervention. So, if it were applied, there would be no hospital that could say to the woman, no, we don't do it here, arrange yourself. So, I think that if I have to make a balance, I have to say that dealing with this means being close to the woman, as well as being close to her to operate on her or to give birth to her, must be done with seriousness and empathy.

And I think I can say, perhaps a little humbly, that it seems to me that we have succeeded enough. Have you had experience with movements or activists that took place in your study or hospital? No, not in my hospital or in the consultancies where I worked. As I was saying, what I encountered were demonstrations outside the FIAPAC congresses. A little everywhere. It happened in Vienna, Berlin, Seville, Edinburgh. I repeat, paradoxically, there was no mobilisation in Rome. I think, on the one hand, that if I were against something that concerns personal and individual choices, I would not choose this instrumentalisation. What I find very serious when it happens outside the workplaces is that it affects the freedom of women who go to work.

This is serious when it happens. Fortunately, many countries have taken action against this demonstration.

A very serious thing, and I'm sure you've read about it, happened with the burial against the will of women. It was a case of therapeutic abortions, of very painful situations, because they are unwanted pregnancies in which a diagnosis is made of some foetal pathology, because a woman interrupts the pregnancy.



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In Rome, there were, and I can give references, these very serious episodes, because there was on the cross the name of the woman, a lesion of the inadmissible privacy. This is another link I can give.

- How central is conscientious objection in the pro-life strategy in Italy?
- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?
- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?
- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?
- What were the major turning point for pro-life movement in Italy?

There is a position of the European Parliament Observatory, the European Forum, which is another important link, I do not know if you know it, that it would be the case to interview Neil Dutta, I can give the reference, who has dealt with the situation at the European level. I think that paradoxically Italy, maybe because Italy is helped by the institutions directly, so you will know that since the Meloni government, there have been deliberations to bring associations of the third sector, in some places. It happened in Turin, with the famous room of the Ascolto, and what is serious there is that people are paid without any professional competence, ; and moreover, I am very annoyed because it seems that after 46 years of application of the law. That we, operators of support, do not intervene with the woman and that if the woman is not sure, we do not offer all the possibilities. This is what the law says, but it is a very ideologically thing, very instrumental, to condemn and reject totally, it is as if a Jehovah's Witness was accepted in a transfusional centre.

It depends a lot on the regions. This applies to all aspects of public and private health. In Italy there is the so-called leopard print regarding the standards and the application.

I have had the luck, I don't know if it can be called luck, but the experience of a positive attitude from my hosts and also from the Lazio region, which is the region of Rome, because the Lazio region was the first to implement the pharmacological abortion in an ambulatory, which is something that in almost all the countries where this method exists, it is also done at home. This is important, because there are situations where at home it is not good. So we were able, with a technical table in the Lazio region, to pass these guidelines. I can also give bibliographic references on this. After the Minister of Health and Hope in 2020, because of Covid, which also

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had positive things, had made guidelines to allow the procedure in a non-hospitalary regime with undoubted advantages and because there was no risk of contagion at the time of the pandemic, but also from an economic point of view. If the performance can be performed with a big economic difference, the criterion of appropriateness should not be an imposition, as long as the woman wants it. The criterion of appropriateness indicates applying the procedure less or nervous. We are working a lot on this as the Luca Coscioni Association, of which I am part. We are committed, after writing repeatedly to the Minister of Health, and now we would like to act on the presidents of the regions on this matter.

I have experience of pharmacological abortion since 2000, so I am only 25 years old. When I went for the first time to a FIAPAC congress in Paris, the world opened up to me, because I had the opportunity to go from the aspect of militancy abortion to the aspect of scientific abortion. So, seeing in person the protagonists of scientific literature about abortion was a beautiful thing and very encouraging for me. It is very interesting because there is one thing that I would like to underline. A doctor who does not feel concerned is a bad doctor even in procedures that do not concern voluntary abortion, for example in miscarriage. Why? Because having no experience with voluntary pharmacological abortion, they do wrong procedures even with spontaneous abortion. There are even those who continue to do the rasciament, the chortage, because they believe that the aspiration, the hysterossuction, as it is called, is reserved for voluntary abortion.

When the Kármán method I met Kármán because we had invited him as a radical party in the 1970s to Rome. When the Kármán method it was associated with voluntary abortion and therefore it was not used in spontaneous abortion, forcing the woman, the patient to a treatment that certainly is not the optimal standard. The same thing happens with pharmacological abortion because you can treat spontaneous abortion with the method and the pharmacological procedure. Complications occur one or two days after the surgery and normally women go to the emergency room where there is probably a doctor who is aware and therefore does not know how to manage the complication. I have repeatedly done the photography with documentation of the management of the complication in a completely inappropriate way, simply because they do not know the doctor, it is not acceptable.

You have a haemorrhage, if you do not know how to understand that an iconography should be interpreted in a certain way when there has been a pharmacological approach, it is not justified. This is about assistance, not about the procedure of the surgery. So this is an important

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discussion of scientific societies. So I find that Italian scientific societies that now do shy courses, but for many years they have not dealt with this, just as universities, specialisation courses, do not teach to do these procedures, which do not only concern the voluntary execution of pregnancy, but also the spontaneous abortion. So there are generations of new specialists in gynaecology who may not have the experience we had when we were committed to applying the new law well.

Yes, it has reached a very important point, because in reality, as someone says, in Italy it is not true that abortion is allowed. Exactly. It is allowed only in those circumstances. So the principle of self-determination, as it is, for example, recognised in France, when they removed, modifying the law, the criterion of *détresse*, abolishing the situation of *détresse*, a woman can stop the pregnancy simply because at that moment she does not want to follow a path of maternity. So yes, the Italian law should, after 46 years, be able to be changed in this sense.

There are other points that the Luca Rosconi Association in particular has indicated as important to modify. For example, and once again we look at France, the 7-day deletion. This is really ... Because, I repeat, if reflection is needed, we are the first to say that you have to take 2-3 weeks if necessary. It happened to me several times to say, you have time until ... But that it is automatically necessary means taking women for stupid things that do not make sense, that need reflection for 7 days.

The other thing, if I may, which in my opinion should be changed in the Italian law with determination, I say, is the abortion of the second trimester, as we mentioned before, because it cannot be done when there is the possibility of autonomous foetal life, unless there is a risk for the life of the woman. But it cannot be done. And this means that if the diagnosis is late, women have to go abroad. It certainly concerns a minimum percentage of pregnancies in our country, but if it also concerned a single woman, it would mean that the law does not protect her as it should. And we, both as the Luca Rosconi Association, but also as gynaecologists, are always surrounded by requests, where can they go? And even doctors or doctors of conscience call you and say, where can my patient go? I mean, I am not the curator of the consciences of anyone, for heaven's sake, but it undoubtedly makes you reflect on such a thing. So that is another very important point To consider that it should be morally accepted, if not morally accepted... I have to say that started my political activism with the battle for the objection of conscience at the military service. So maybe I was influenced by that. But actually, no. I think that if I had to go to a doctor who judges me as a murderer, as a hitman, frankly, no. I don't think that's the case.

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It's a matter of organisation. Let's not forget that in countries like England and France there is a closed conscience. That's not why the access to the procedure is like that. So let's say that in Italy there is an objection of comfort. I don't want to deal with this thing, so the law allows me to do so. But I have to repeat, the law would actually force you to refer to someone who deals with the woman who asks for the imposition of confidentiality.



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6. Interview n°6

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your professional background in the association?

We were born as a cultural association in 2013, on the side of an agreement that we organised on gender ideology that began to emerge in our country already from 2011-2012, and in those years we observed this phenomenon, especially in relation to the many complaints that we received from parents and families here in the territory of the province of Rome, and we began to study this phenomenon, because it was totally new and, above all, totally unknown. There were few of us who, on the web, followed some edition of online journalistic publications.

There was only one publication in Carthaginian, which spoke of these topics, and it was the paper of the publisher Giuliano Ferrara, and then on the web, via e-mail, we tried to confront ourselves with some people who began to be interested in the phenomenon like us. After this agreement, some people approached us, including two families, and they asked us to form an association for the protection of the rights to the educational primacy of parents. So we started, by chance, with the will to follow up that agreement in which we had invited not only a writer who had recently published his thesis on gender, so an absolute novelty at that time, and some exponents, both political and scientific, who supported our investigation and therefore confirmed our need to start this path.

In that same context, a few months earlier, Pope Francis had declared that gender was an ideological colonisation and that a kind of experimentation had been adopted with children, and he said that with children you cannot experiment because they are not laboratory cables. This sentence that we quoted in that agreement was a bit of a push to believe that we were not actually visionaries, but that we were investigating a field, certainly unknown, but on which we wanted

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to go to the end. From there we organised, together with other exponents of associative realities, a huge square that in Italy, in 2015 and 2016, brought to the square about a million people, called Femini Day, and that in the two huge squares, which took place a few months later, we were finally able to make the word gender appear in the newspapers, and therefore stop this ideology.

In the meantime, in all these years, we have formed a series of work tables, close interlocutions with many institutions, ministries, with politics, even though it is an apolitical and apartheid association, and a confessional one, from the point of view of a declaration of intentions. But certainly we draw very close lines, obviously, to the Christian Catholic religion, and together with many other associations, we have started a close work, especially with the Ministry of Public Education, with the various ministers who have succeeded, up to the achievement of a great victory, which was that of a MIUR note in 2018, which elevated the priority of family education choices within school institutions. A document that envies us all over Europe, because in France, Germany, but also in England, etc., these violations are punished by parents in wanting to support their children with gender projects in schools. We are still quite free to express ourselves and to be able to make choices.

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

Let's say that we have dealt, let's say, not in a direct way with the issue of abortion, but certainly we have attempted to take a certain position in this debate, because it was clear that our feeling was not against women who wanted to abort, but it was a need to accompany these women, often in situations of abandonment, of loneliness, and who often made the decision to abort their child because there was no other hope in front of them. This position of ours, of supporting women in the right to be happy and certainly in the right to tell the truth about what abortion really involves in a woman's life, has always been labelled as our position in violating the right to abortion and the right to choose for a woman whether to have a child or not. But in reality, Law 194 was not born as a right to abortion, because in the law we never talk about the right to abortion, nor about the self-determination of the woman, because the law is more based on the protection of the health of the woman and therefore shows a certain preference for birth.

However, these same parts, which our area considers good, are very weak, because they are partly contaminated by a logic that is not really in favour of the right to be born. There are provisions that are ambiguous, that is, they are not at all clear, so the existence of the child in



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the womb of the mother is not denied, but it is completely put in the shade. And this form of misunderstanding is part of all the injustice of the law. That is, the law provides an interpretation which is then managed and interpreted as if the law were to say that abortion is a right. In reality, the law does not say so. Now, we have always aspired, since unfortunately today, it must be said with great clarity, today the law 194, especially for girls, now the target of girls who abort goes down in a dizzying way already from the age of 12, 13, 14 years old, the law 194 has been interpreted as an anti-conceptual, that is, something that, in defence of an error, either you take the pill the next day, which is still an abortion, or you go back to abortion with an ease that really has nothing to do with what was the beginning of a law that wanted to help women in difficulty. We have never said that we want to cancel 194. We have said that, since every law by its nature is reversible, even abrogable, we would like to be linked to what was said when this law was passed, that is, that it was approved with the promise of a revision, which never happened. And so, this sentence that keeps coming back, the law does not touch, is a sort of denial of those like us who try to face this aspect with a delicacy that looks not only at the life of the child, which is not a cluster of cells that has been widely explained as already a human being at the time of conception, but above all, to come and tell us that we are against women is the antithesis of what has been all our work in so many years of support for women themselves. Now, in the face of this, since we have seen the block to every attempt of ours to be able to explain that instead we would like to accompany the woman, to give her the opportunity, for example, there are the arses for life, you can give birth anonymously, there are supports to help the girls, but also to help them to enter into a truth that that is a wound from which it will no longer heal.

I have a very vivid experience in the flesh of these days. Last week a friend of mine called me to tell me that her daughter's friend, a girl, a 27-year-old woman, had discovered that she had remained pregnant and wanted to abort. However, we realised that this girl was totally in the hands of many friends who told her, look, it's very simple, now it's still nothing, a lump of cells, but when she talked to me and this friend of mine in a very frank and serene way, he understood many things that the propaganda says. He also understood that she does not want to enter a tunnel where her life will be upset forever and that remorse will create an unhealable pain. But we also gave her a support, not only for all the time of pregnancy, but we also told her that if she wanted to change her mind, we can help her in the matter of adoption, we can give birth anonymously, some lifeguards help, for those who do not know, to be able to give birth, not only anonymously, but immediately to someone and they feel lifted from what they still live



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with a weight. But we have seen that many women, after having passed the first serious block of fear, not only keep the baby, but almost all of them said to a priest in these days that of all the women he confessed in his life, of all the women with children and who had a child, he never said, I regretted having this child, but of all those who aborted, they all regretted it.

This is the long root on this matrix that the woman carries with her, to be a real factory of life, a collaborator of life. This is a fact linked to our DNA and we tell this to the girls.

As an association, we also promoted a campaign in 2016, which was called the hashtag rights of freedom and that was to be able to enter schools and tell all the truth to the girls about the issue of abortion. So not only the propaganda that the ASL of the area do in schools to give instructions for the use, how not to remain pregnant and how to be able to abort even without the consent of the parents. But scientifically founded news on how not only the pill of the next day is harmful, not only of health, but it causes terrible pain, almost of an act, which is not true, which is a simple taquipirina, and therefore to tell the girls the truth also about that wound which remains all resistance. From this, of course, we have tried to give this awareness that in the womb of the woman there is a potential life, a life project, a real human being, unique and unrepeatable, which is a son. And then we tried to promote, to support, that the care of life before birth must contain and take into account a very special condition of pregnancy. That is, there are two people in one, a unique situation that a human being who lives and grows into another human being. And then you can protect the child in the womb without the collaboration of his mother. So we don't want to prevent abortion with the criminal threat, because many said let's make it a real let's say a crime. But it is to share with her the difficulty she may have and to try to overcome it together in a welcome path that concerns the woman and the child within her womb. This is a bit what we have carried out.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

Let's say that in principle, for the contents that each of us protects and wants to protect, we all agree on the same content line. Certainly on the modalities we often divide ourselves. Because the modalities are those that connote not only people but also cultural areas like ours, who intend to interact maybe not only with society but also with politics and with the culture of the moment, attempting a scientifically founded approach, an approach often even propagandistic, and others an approach that sometimes becomes a bit aggressive, so it risks mortifying communication and a democratic so this sometimes divides, but I repeat, never in the contents



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that we have always, let's say, in almost all of our experiences in these ten years have always been very let's say, shared.

Then, certainly there are areas today for example in the Catholic Church that are a little more let's say conservative and more modern areas but this doesn't change much the substance even if sometimes this has determined public positions that are quite different so it has certainly created confusion in those who above all follow let's say the Catholic religion. This let's say in the conservative area has tried not to keep in a drastic way the contents on which we have not been flexible but on some, let's say, cardinals for example of the Magisterium of the Church of the Bimillenary Deposit of Christianity we have never wanted to make discounts and we have never accepted to make discounts on a deposit so deep, so dense and so important for us so as not to lose the novelty of the Gospels. However, we too observe this phenomenon let's say of modernism and we see how this has touched some areas, certainly also cultural in our world.

So, our association has, let's say, the headquarters in Rome as a let's say national headquarters but we have different territorial and regional cells that, let's say, in some way have the commitment to have, let's say, presence almost in all Italian regions. We are more widespread in the centre and north of Italy a little less in the south of Italy but, let's say, we are quite extensive but we also intervene in the cultural and social debate I would say a little throughout the national level.

And you have different ways of how do you say to act I don't know, to act action to look at the regions for your attention. In the regions, we are mostly focused on creating small cells of parents that we call sentinels and that is they can monitor in the schools what happens to the education of their children and involve, let's say the competent authorities of the area to intervene where there are educational and educational abuses. Moreover, we are willing also in various regions to be, let's say, present when we are invited to hold conferences, meetings of training or of information but, above all, also demonstrations in the squares that can also be held in different places in Rome and in which we are invited to be present and we accept the need to be present even outside our territory.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

In this decade, at least as regards our area, surely the strategies that we have tried to implement have been, first of all, the compactness, that is to be always united on some points that have never separated us and therefore to put pressure in a journalistic, cultural, even political way,



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trying to contaminate a little the decision-making area, above all political, but also to be in charge of being a single compact front that on public communication also on the Internet.

But above all on social networks, because it is the one that today, obviously, is more fruitful, precisely from the point of view of the timing with which the communication arrives.

Yes, we have taken care of the whole part of our blog, so writing articles, commenting also positions different from ours, we have tried to often leave interviews, we have been invited in some spaces, let's say radio, TV. We have, for example, the commitment of a radio network called Radio Mater, where we have been present for three years with our broadcast in a space called the Educational Alliance. That, as well as the blog channel on a site dedicated to our association Non si tocca la famiglia, are, let's say, the channels, in addition to direct Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., where we can convey our message. This, together with what many friends do with us, has created a conscious front that has certainly incised in these years in the public debate, I repeat, cultural and political, also cinematographic, because we have been connected for ten years to a cinema project in schools in collaboration with a famous director in Italy, Pupi Avati, who on the themes of family, education, freedom and love has guarded a very strong influence on the episodes that we have carried out in these years.

This has also allowed us to have a certain influence in naming the name of this director so famous in Italy and around the world, being able to appreciate contents that are dear to us, therefore linked to the heart of man. This, therefore, also as a cinematographic space, but we have also seen how all the publishing related to some newspapers such as La Verità, but also Il Foglio, and also other online newspapers such as La Bussola Quotidiana, Tempi, etc., are all journalistic heads, both on paper and online, who tell and collect our articles and therefore we have been given this space which has certainly had a great value. And then having participated also with Realità dell'Opposizione in public confrontations in which we have been able to give our point of view not only in our spaces but also in the spaces of the opposition of our thought.

- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

Let's say that this answer is very connected to the one I just gave, in the sense that the strategies that we have adopted have been those in ministries or in various institutions in which we have been involved and called to intervene. And certainly in this, at least, decade I can be firm in being able to say that the results obtained, for example, the universal conviction of the homeless person has been a great result, connected above all to this compactness that has seen all those

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who were connected to us and also part of the opposition, because there have been characters, even on the left, who have supported our determination to consider the homeless person a crime against women and against humanity.

Let's say this compactness has seen all those who were connected to us and also part of the opposition, because there have been, let's say, characters, even on the left, who have supported our determination to consider rent-sharing as a crime against women and humanity.

So, if we could make a sort of x-ray of these strategies that have influenced the evolution of the pro-life movement, paradoxically, we could also say that in the moments in which we have intercepted the sensitivity and the common sense also of those areas on the left, therefore opposed to us, which, however, shared those lines on which we have spent a lot, this was perhaps one of the winning weapons that has been able to give expansion to our thought. I say this also in relation, for example, to the feminists. That is, the current transgender feminist movement is a movement that has nothing to do with the real feminists of the 1970s. They are two completely different worlds. Even the great push that we have received in condemning gender in Italy, and therefore all the transgender propaganda in schools, has come to us with great help from the feminist world.

Here is that of the RadFem, which are all the feminists who today write, I give some names, Marina Terragni, who, for example, has recently been nominated as a guarantee for childhood, for example, in this government. So they are all personalities that, I repeat, even though they are very far from us on many issues, on some issues, on the other hand, their support, their support, but also their statement of intentions, obviously has given great support to our theses. And certainly also to reach today a stability of government that, on our issues, obviously, converges, this has definitely helped in these three years the takeoff of many actions that we, in these past years, where there has always been the left-wing government, not elected, but still present, had limited in a rather heavy way.

Despite everything, we have always continued, we have never stopped, but it is clear that at this moment we find a platform that supports those themes that were before, on which you could not even talk about. So, certainly, having intercepted elements that on the left have married some of our causes that they shared, they have, I repeat, had a rent, also another cause married, for example, by a part of the left, it was that of freedom of educational choice, that is, what today in Italy represents all the public equal education, which instead today, especially after the pandemic, has risked dying of stents, because the public schools, which are still today a



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presidium of freedom in many territories, have not only closed because they have not been supported anymore, but parents, not being able to pay the rent, which in reality was a great violation compared to the fact that a parent, to register a child in a public school, pays the taxes twice. That is, he pays the rent twice.

Once he pays the taxes and with the second support he pays the rent to the schools, which, of course, do not support, among other things, the educational quality of a certain level. On this we have had the convergence of some areas on the left, which have recognized that finding adequate funding for a type of free education, such as that of public schools, that is, to be able to choose if you want to go to a public school, today this freedom of choice does not exist in Italy. Even though there is a law in 62 of 2000, which instead sanctioned this possibility of freely choosing the school that was more linked to the values of the family, in any case to the indications that the family wanted to give to their children.

We have seen that, especially in the period when there was still a movement called the Equal Empire on the left, there has been a great help from some exponents who have supported, with us, that today in Italy a poor family cannot have the right to choose the school they want for their children. Today the school they choose is chosen only by the rich, and this is a great social injustice. Converging with some elements on the left, which in fact on this social injustice were mobilized not only the government, but all those areas that could have collaborated to achieve this goal, has certainly been of great help.

This, going back to how these strategies that we have adopted, so to interlocate even with oppositions, have influenced the evolution of our movement and of everything that revolves around the pro-life movement in Italy.

- What were the major turning point for pro-life movement in Italy?

Yes. Well, as I was saying at the beginning, one of the biggest, certainly in the last 20 years, was the first family day on civil rights, which was in 2007, and it was the first family day that was very, very active. The second very important family day was that of 2015, when San Giovanni Laterano and the Circo Massimo in Rome were once again filled in an oceanic way, streets, squares, etc.

These three moments were certainly very decisive, because in the first case the civil unions were stopped, and a law that was ready to pass was blocked, because there was a great compactness in the Catholic Church in that context. While in 2015 and 2016 we already had



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too large shirts within the Catholic world, and this did not allow a very compact position from the Catholic areas on the left, so we are talking about the PD, the Democratic Party. The only thing we were able to break in that context was the adoption by gay couples, so the fact that that was one of the results of those squares, we can say that from that moment on one of the largest cultural campaigns has opened, which in Italy then gave rise to the birth of dozens of associations, committees and cultural realities that on this felt the obligation to make a body, to join in a single battle that could defend not only the family, not traditional, but the natural family, the one that naturally in the union between a man and a woman gives rise to life.

We fought for this, we fought for the free education of our children at school, and we fought for freedom of expression, because another great result obtained. Thanks to this mobilisation was the migration of the DDL-ZAN in Italy, which is equivalent to the Trans Law in Spain, which instead has passed and today prevents anyone from freely expressing their thoughts. This DDL-ZAN, which was a law design, we called it the Bavarian law design, has seen in that context a quantity, not only of associations, but of realities, of which we have spoken so far, compact on the sole purpose of dismantling the law piece by piece, and so we did with the help of lawyers, doctors, specialists, pedagogists, teachers, because there it was also a matter of discussing the freedom of teaching in schools, but above all what was the imposition of some days dedicated to the school order, on which no parent could express their dissent, because they would have been tarnished by the homophobic stigma and the possibility of freely expressing themselves would have been denied, which instead today we can still do thanks to the dismantling of all this.

We have contributed in these years, especially to the birth of a, sorry, not to the birth, to the constitution, a network that has grown more and more, which today is called the network of Italo on the roofs, which is a network that has about 100 associations, within which we are also, and which brings together many themes related and connected to the heart of the human being, which really is of enormous richness. Let's say they are all more or less orientated on the principles of Catholic Christians, but there are also many associations on a secular basis that collaborate with us, with which we have also given life to a great, let's say, mobilisation in the last, especially two years, on the law of the end of life, which unfortunately recently, on February 11, saw the passage in the Tuscan region of this regional law on euthanasia. Also on this we are fighting, because we think that what happened is unconstitutional, and therefore also on this theme, which concerns life very much, from conception to natural death, we all feel compact in constituting a debate that can be structured on the basis of science, reason and right,

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and on the fact that one cannot claim a life not worthy of being lived just because it becomes inactive, just because it becomes a burden for the family, but that is a life that has the right to be lived up to the last breath, with all the commitment that the community must give. First of all the government, with support to the families who obviously support terminal patients at home, and the palliative care that is of support to the patient to alleviate in everything and everywhere the suffering that disease causes. Therefore, even if they have been touched for a long time, we have always said that palliative care is precisely those behaviours that help and support the patient to be able to sustain that disease, but above all the many aids that we have invoked and asked for, and on which we still continue to work, so that the family can be supported and sustained, obviously, in a very difficult stretch of the road.

This is to enhance the value of life up to the end, as well as for abortion in early life. And here there have been many initiatives that in recent years we have carried out also on the cultural level, I repeat, with many seminars of training and information that have helped contribute to a critical thought, to a thought that is always subject, that can be continually subjected to a doubt, to constitute an organic thought, founded, I repeat, always on the basis of science, which today has led, and I conclude, to a great European network, which as an association does not touch the family, together with an observatory in Bioretika, Tuscany, has given life to a European manifesto that we have imported from France and Belgium, which we have spread here in Italy, making Poland, Hungary, Spain, the Republic of San Marino, England, the United States and also Russia join, with two associations that have just contacted us. This is to say no to the transgender propaganda that wants the block and the puberty of children at the most delicate age of their identity building and no to that propaganda that wants first the social transition and then the pharmacological one and finally the definitive surgical one that has led to the rethinking of many people who have had a ruined life.

We are talking about the famous transitioners, who in this time are coming out in considerable quantities and denounce the gravity of all that this propaganda has brought in the narrative of the wrong body, especially to children. Here we have shown on the basis of psychiatry, neuro-infantile psychiatry, but above all of science, as this phase of the evolutionary age that goes from 0 to 18 years is an age in which the evolutionary term says that the boy, the child is in continuous evolution. So you can't block puberty and supply hormones to modify this set that naturally finds its place, supported, accompanied, etc., and that really should be left alone.

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The thousands of denunciations that starExted from the closure of the Tavistock in London, the clinic that brought irreversible damages that come through this triptoreline, this drug too family day liberalised by the IPHA in 2019, but on which we are fighting. To date, the National Committee of Italian Bioethics declared in December the request for maximum prudence in all this protocol that unfortunately still exists in Italy. So our biggest battle today is precisely this, to emerge this European manifesto in which many nations are asking for prudence with a propaganda that is ruining the lives of many children, young people and families.



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7. Interview n°7

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

If you have things you want to ask, or specify, in the sense that you don't understand some things, you can ask them. Let's see if you can come up with something, because surely, now, speaking in person, we could say many things. So, the Law 194 is a law that instituted the so-called euphemistic way of the introduction of the voluntary pregnancy.

Naturally, when there was this referendum, there was no talk of abortion. But in reality, those who instituted, those who proposed this law, talked about the voluntary interruption of pregnancy, in order to conceal what actually is abortion. And abortion, before abortion, they found some reasons in some way useful, in the sense that women, before, aborted clandestinely. So, that they aborted clandestinely, well, that's what is necessary to understand. All the excuses, and all the reasons they gave to make this law were that women aborted clandestinely, that women died during childbirth, that, practically, sometimes, women were raped and therefore had to keep the baby, that the baby was born disabled, and therefore with problems. So, practically, it is legitimate to suppress the human being that is in the womb of the woman, according to the promoters of this law.

It is obvious that, as you know well, since you also study law, as you know well, the law makes culture. And the law, making culture, changes the way of thinking of people. If a behavior before is illegal, is penally punishable, and tomorrow, immediately after, becomes legal, it is obvious that, from the cultural point of view, you say, yes, but it is no longer legal, it is allowed, it is even paid by the national health service.

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What is the problem? It is obvious that many women who have considered abortion as a moment of emancipation from the point of view of the human being, have practically been considered to have the right of excellence.

For me, abortion has certainly promoted an abortive mentality. But what is abortion fundamentally? It is the killing, a murder of the human being who is in the womb of a woman. And you say, but the woman has to decide. But to decide what? If she decided on her life, on her own life, well, it would be admissible. But the problem is that it is not her life. The one who has the womb is another being, another life. And then, a woman, apart from the fact that even a man can decide.

A little boy came to me, younger than you, and one day he told me, a lawyer, who is so young, he said, my daughter is pregnant. He said, I would like my daughter to keep this baby while she wants to have an abortion. What can I do? I told him, according to Law 194, you can't do anything. Because the woman has the right of life or death on this human being in her womb. So, even if your daughter will kill, I didn't say it like that, but she will kill your son. The son who could be born, you could be a father in a few months, while your daughter decided to kill this son. So, the point is this, for me it's not a right, it's a crime. So, what I'm saying to you is if I said it publicly, it could lead to serious problems. Tomorrow, I have to go to many conferences around Italy to defend that the family is formed by a man, a woman, and children. I was protected by the police in anti-sleeping clothes because it was strange and it was something absurd that a person could defend such a family. There were people with posters against me, because I was considered homophobic, because I was considered a person, which is not true. I think that we have to make things clear. It's obvious that on abortion it's considered, let's stay on this topic, because I said it's a family right, we could talk about family rights but we don't have to.

My question is about 194. I make this whole process of deconstruction of the family born in 1968, last century. You are very young, how old are you? I was born in 2002.2002? Yes, 2002. So you are a child. What I want to tell you is that for you 1968 doesn't mean anything. But in 1968 you have to know that this could be useful for your thesis.

1968 : Cultural revolution has begun. No, cultural and sexual. Because in 1968 and then in Italy in 1977 there were square revolts, there were class struggles and there was a sexual revolution. Free sex started and then also in America there was the diffusion of pornographic films that began to show sexual relations. It started and in my book Family in Italy From Divorce to

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Gender edited by Sudarco I described this process of deconstruction of the family. Why am I telling you this?

Because in 1968 there was a fundamental process that I described with two sentences of the Italian Constitutional Court that declared illegitimate the crime of adultery. So adultery was no longer considered. Then in 1970 we have the law on the aspect of... So in 1968 we have adultery. Actually, in 1968 there was the liberalization of selling, this is important, the liberalisation of selling and advertising of genitalia. So this aspect with two sentences of the Constitutional Court of 1965 and 1968 there was the liberalisation of selling and advertising of genitalia. Before that you couldn't sell and advertise genitalia. Then we have two other sentences of the Constitutional Court that, as regards adultery, they removed the penalty. Then there was the law on divorce in 1970 and in 1978 we have the law 194. So there were also other stages, but these are the most important. So this process of deconstruction of the family that started in 1968 because if you go deeper into it I recommend you to do it because in 1968 there was the cultural and sexual revolution and from there you can take a cue to understand why there was an abortion. Because in 1968 I don't say it in bad words No, I know it. Ah, with me? Yes, I know 1968. Ah, I thought you didn't know it. Ah, later because I did the French translation and I remember a little. Ah, very well. So, workers against masters, students against professors, husbands against husbands, children against parents. So there was a class struggle within this institution. So let's say that from this point of view, abortion was a consequence because self-determination sex was now free.

In 1968 it was called free sex and as feminists said there was feminism that carried on abortion divorce sex is mine and I manage it and feminists did this slogan sex is mine and they replaced it because they said I can do whatever I want Ah, no, no, no, sex, excuse me, the body is mine and I manage it. This was the slogan but you can also sign the body is mine and I manage it. So, practically this slogan of feminists meant that women have absolute self-determination and that it depends on the husband, on the partner, on the father, on the child and on the human being that is in the womb. I call it a human being because if you call it baby, it is not yet a baby it is not born yet and it is not even a person when a person is born it is a human being that is in the womb because it is potentially a man, a woman, a person. So, the influence of abortion from a cultural point of view was enormous.

Today we have the various pills the pill of the next day, the pill of the next three days, the pill of the next five days and so these are also pills some of these are abortions because the nesting

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of the egg for example the one of the next five days the RU486 has already happened and so there is an abortion.

My students told me they told me that today I don't know if you can confirm this that now women, girls no longer use some contraceptive like for example the condom or the condom would be the condom or the pill or the spiral all these things but now women have relations normally and then they take the pill of the next day because if we take the pill of the next day in such a way that as you can see there has been this minority and you must understand that the way with the RU68 then there was another important stage that came before the abortion which is the reform of the family law so once there was the head of the family the man and practically daughters, wives and children were subjects then after the reform of the family law the family was not protected as a group but individual members of the family so practically before the RU68 in the 50s in certain countries. I don't know if you were in Rome when you were in Italy so Rome but in certain countries of the south of the inland up to 30 years ago women couldn't go alone to the bar, you couldn't go out alone with the boyfriends you couldn't go on holidays with the boyfriend so there was another structure of the society so with these liberalisations we got to a society where women could go about abroad.

Abortion is considered, and is considered, as an unsurpassable and, in some way, primary right of our society. When, for me it is a crime. Because abortion kills a human being that is in the womb of the woman. And the woman has no right, in reality, to kill this human being. Because no one, even if the child, if the human being, should be less sick.

I ask myself and I ask you, between life and disease, what is more important? Life. Because without life, there would be no disease. So, how can we do something of less importance to kill a human being? I remember, and I close here, if we want we can go deeper in this aspect, otherwise all the questions, I don't know if you will be able to bear all these things I'm telling you.

I was telling you, once a girl came to me, who was about 25, 28 years old, and she told me, I don't know how she managed to talk about abortion. She was in favor of abortion, of divorce, and I told her, do you have 5 minutes? 5, 10, 15 minutes? Because I want to show you a documentary called The Silent Scream. You can also download this. It was in black and white, the one that circulated, and it is the iconography of an abortion. You don't see bloody things, but you see, those who practice abortion, and there is this that comments, shows the forceps, which is a kind of clamp that goes into the uterus of the woman and breaks this human being



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that shoots with the head, the head is broken, and you can see how it is sucked up, once it is divided into pieces. And this girl, once she saw this, she became anti-abortionist, and now, even publicly, she fights for life, against abortion. To say that sometimes, she is against abortion. She is in favor of abortion, but in fact, this government, the Italian government, also inserted a clause that before practicing abortion, the consultants should show me, the iconography, the heart that beats for the woman. Because if you see the beating heart, maybe, you say, but here I have a human being, it is not a thing.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

Let's say that the pro-life movement is not homogeneous, because there was initially a pro-life movement, there is a pro-life movement, it is present, but there have been various movements, when there was the referendum on abortion, many groups were born, many movements in favour of life, those who were more transvestite, those who were less transvestite, and so there are movements that, over time, even though they are in favour of life, have become very free, in the sense that they have thought of saying, well, but if the woman, or if the child, if he comes, so there is a possibility of abortion. And there are other groups, for example, I don't know, pro-life, pro-life and family, and other groups, both life and family, there are various other groups that have a much clearer, more rigid vision, life is not negotiable.

So let's say that there is no real unity, but there was, in this last one, I participated in May, in a March for Life, which was held in Rome, and it is held every year in Rome. You will graduate in May, and in May they will do the March for Life. And practically there is this March for Life, which is not organised by the Catholic Church, but it is organised by various acronyms. Even here, there are not all Catholic groups, there are not all movements, because it is organised, above all, by those groups that believe that abortion, etc., etc., is a murder. The movements, on the other hand, a little more free within the Church, do not participate, because they distance themselves from this position, which is a little more rigid, a little more integral. Not integral, but integral.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

So, in my opinion, there have not been great strategies, in the sense that it has been sought, I am also involved in life sciences, to promote life, but there has not been... Here, what is



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important as a strategy is that, for example, now there is the central-right government, which governs Italy, and well, potentially, it should be, but it is not so, it should be anti-abortionist.

So, one could say, well, let's cancel Law 194. Well, they will never do it, Meloni also said it, we do not do it because it is a right, etc. But why? Because if they said, let's cancel Law 194, there would be an insurrection in the square. And then, the strategy, which practically has not been implemented in a systematic way, and in a clear way, despite many actions by associations and well-deserved people who have worked, is to prepare, from a cultural point of view, the ground for an evolution of the way of thinking. It is useless to impose a law with force. Well, from now on, let's cancel abortion, but there would be a revolt. What we have to wait for, instead, is an action of awareness of women, of society, to understand that abortion is a homicide and that it is not a thing... For example, I intervened yesterday on the proposal of a law, not a proposal of a law, but a regional law that was made in Tuscany on the end of life. For example, in Belgium, and it seems to me that it is quite clear, but also in Belgium, it seems to me that euthanasia is quite free.

Yes, exactly. Well, I came up with the fact that we live in a nihilist society. I mean, the fact that we think about how to give death and how to die... I said, look, once... And this is also because there is no longer, even about abortion, we no longer live in a Christian society. As long as there was Christianity, perhaps you have never lived in this situation. In fact, I think you are not a Christian, no? Or... I am... No, I am... I am a Baptist. Ah, a Baptist. Yes, exactly. Ah, so you are a Protestant. Ah, no, I am... No, I am a Christian. Christian and Baptist. Yes, exactly. But in our church, the Protestant Church, the Baptist Church, is of Protestant origin, which derives from the Protestant Reformation of Lutero. Yes. But I am not a Protestant. Protestant would be... It is not a thing that you protest. Yes, no, I understand. No, because the Baptist Church... Ah, it is Christian. Yes, it is Christian, but at the same time it is part of the Protestant fringe. Because there was... Before there was the Church, the Church, right? Created by Jesus Christ. And, of course, in 1517, in 1517, Lutero decided to make a schism. To say, enough, I don't want to stay with the Pope anymore. I decide what... In fact, we do the free examination of the Scriptures. So, the free examination of the Scriptures means that I read the Scripture and I interpret it. The Lord speaks to me.

And so I interpret it. I don't need an interpretation from the Church. And from here, then, many fringes are born. The Baptists, the Anglicans, the Methodists, and there are many fringes that derive from the Protestant Church of Lutero. You see? So, let's say that once, when the Church



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was strong and there was a very strong Christian presence in Italy, certainly there was not this... I mean, they believed and respected each other. And if one suffered, he offered to the Lord his suffering.

Today, instead, it is not that one dies, I want to die. Because one can also give one's life for a great reason. I offer myself... For example, there was San Massimiliano Colpe, who I don't know if you know him, who was... a priest was killed when the Nazi camp was killed for another prisoner. I give my life to save you. Or for a great... Today, instead, one dies because one wants to escape from life. And one wants, in some way, to escape from one's destiny. So, from this point of view, life no longer makes sense if one suffers. And in this aspect there is a whole process in which life is set in motion. From abortion, from conception to birth, to the natural end. Today, it is man who decides whether to make a life or not. It has no longer become a value that must be safeguarded at all costs. Now, man can do less and, indeed, he is given the enormous authorisation to kill. Because as they kill a child, a human being in the womb of a woman, he is now given the authorisation and the doctors to kill an old man, or a sick person. Not all sick people are terminally ill. There are also sick people who, for example, are depressed and therefore go for an autopsy.

So, from this point of view, what should be done in this case? The strategy is that of a cultural path that can be cultural, not in books, but as a way of thinking, to try to spread a culture of life against the culture of death. Today, we live in a culture of death, a nihilistic culture, so it is necessary to prospect a culture of life that respects human life from the conceit to the natural. And unfortunately, and I close, unfortunately, this aspect of the... I notice that there is so much compassion for animals and, instead, no compassion often for men.

- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

There were other strategies, instead, with the consultants, but especially with the Movement for Life, which tried to welcome these people, mothers and so on, with some silent work. Instead, the pro-life movement and other movements tried to raise flags, without attention, life is a right. They started to pray the rosary in front of the clinics, and so on. So, in an emblematic way, they testified about... At the end of the day, there was not at the moment...

Yes, there is an awareness, but also, for example, in the Catholic Church. The Pope took a stand against abortion, but there is not... For example, on the first Sunday of February, in the Italian churches, the Day for Life. In many churches, the Day for Life is not even mentioned, because,

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practically, it happens a little in silence, because here, we are afraid to blame women who are aborting, and so we almost want to... Because we cannot talk about these things. So, I think it is necessary, instead, a cultural action that can help our society to overcome this culture of death, to overcome this absolute self-determination in favour of a culture of life.

- What were the major turning point for pro-life movement in Italy?

After the law, when there was the abortion treaty, there was a great mobilisation. Then it was lost and there was not a real... Let's say that once abortion had become a right. It was almost as the law says, between cultures, women went to clinics, they had an abortion. They did it even when they could with money. But if they were caught, then both them and the surgeon went to jail. Instead, now it is possible to abort.

So, now how did they influence... No, now how did the main moments of evolution... I hope that as an evolution life is protected in a way from the point of view that there is a cultural point of view and a awareness is given to society of the overcoming of the culture of death as I said before, in favour of a culture for life. So, the strategy is to make a change of mentality and the Pro-Life movements should unite to do a common action to change the way of thinking of the people. But not because it is necessary to inform, but because it is right. It is right that no human being if he is in pain, if he is about to die and if he is old, etc. it is not right to be killed.



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8. Interview n°8

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is to understand how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin? Do you consent to participate and be interviewed? YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

The truth is unfortunately as we saw with the fall of Roe vs Wade in 2022, it's like mostly you can't do anything to ensure that an abortion law will not be touched. The only like the maximum security that you can reach for an abortion law is to enshrine it in the constitution and very few countries have done that but that is the maximum maximum protection you can give to this right. Otherwise, even the most old and famous and respected law can be overturned.

Even though it was a win years ago, they can still be overruled by whoever is in power. So, that is something that I think most countries have seen. Neither their abortion laws overruled in a good way.

I mean in the sense of like a very conservative law being overruled by a more liberal abortion law. But that is not something that will stay like that forever unless you actually protect it constitutionally. Otherwise, any congress, any president can just remove it.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

That is a great question. I think what we are seeing now, probably like the 2010s and onwards, is a unified and homogenous anti-rights movement. We know, we have discovered this. They are all interconnected, which is why you can see that they use the same language in Latin America, Europe, and even Asia. They just copy and paste the exact same arguments, right? So, they are obviously trying to present as a unified front.



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Yeah, it was very different. And actually, even Catholics and evangelicals before 1990, they did not care about abortion. They did not care. They just found out that this was like a common enemy that they could unite to hate. But it used to not be like that at all. But people forget very easily that that was not the case. And as you obviously may know, but like Roe versus Wade was fast in the 70s because of privacy rights, not because of... I mean, it was never about women's freedom. It was always about privacy rights. And it is still very much about control, not about like, oh, you know, maybe women discern bodily autonomy now. Like, that's always been something else. And don't get me wrong. I believe that in order to pass a law, sometimes you do have to compromise with the more conservative folks. And if the argument is going to be privacy in order to get them to vote in favour, then fine. So be it. You're never going to convince the far right of bodily autonomy. So if they're going to align with you for other reasons, then great. You do what you have to do politically to get them on board. But yeah, it's not that they believe in that.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

So actually, I would centuries, not decades, centuries, not caring or not referring to abortion at all. And then in 1917, that was the first time ever that they said, oh, we actually don't like abortion. But the Catholic Church has 2000 years of history, and they never once talked about abortion or opposed it institutionally until the 20th century. So it's crazy that people think, oh, religions have always been against abortion. That's not the truth. That is just wrong. That is not the case. And Judaism actually is very poor choice.

It's very ingrained in their faith that having that choice is part of their religion. So even though the pro-life movement has used or utilised religious language to defend whatever they believe in, it's just a rhetoric. It's not real. It has been useful, though. People now kind of do believe that if you're religious, you are also conservative and you are also pro-life. And I hate pro-life.

That's not what they are. I mean, women die every day for not having access to safe abortion. So if you are pro-abortion, are you pro-death? It doesn't make sense to me that we call them pro-life and not anti-choice. I don't know if that answers the question. Yeah, it answers the question. It's also, I think, a matter of not being offended to them, because if you say to them that they are anti-choice, then you state clearly what they are. Saying pro-life is more acceptable for everyone. It validates. Yeah, it validates. Right? Yes. So it's a wise choice of words, but it's just not correct.



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- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

I would say that the increasing amount of religious language in the far-right strategies has kind of forced the pro-choice movement to also incorporate faithful and religious language into their own discourse. Because it used to be very secular. This talking about abortion was always about access to health, and it was between you and your doctor, and even about keeping your marriage alive. So the fact that right now, the far-right is very much invoking all types of religious imagery when opposing abortion, kind of forces the pro-choice movement to respond in the same way. Otherwise, if you can't respond in the language that they speak to you, you're going to lose. You have to be prepared and respond. Every time they quote the Bible, you quote the Bible as well. And you say, actually, that's not what he says, etc. So yeah, I would say that the pro-life movement has gotten extremely, I don't want to say fanatic, but it's a conservatism, and such a Christian nationalism thing that they're doing that wasn't there before. It just wasn't.

They become obsessed with the life being a conception without any scientific backup to that. And whenever you want to talk about science, they will bring up religion and try to sidetrack the conversation. And they have been very successful in doing that and making people feel guilty about their morals and consciences. Just creating this kind of space heaven for people to openly hate women who have abortions just because their religion allows them to do that. So yes, I think that's the most important pivot on the pro-life movement in the last few decades, just like misusing religious discourse to defend their positions. And maybe, do you think also maybe associating clearly with far-right politics as well, is it like a strategy of these pro-life movements in these last decades? Yes, yes, of course. The far-right is very much involved into all this. It can be, it can look very different, of course, in Latin America versus the U.S. or Europe. But if you look closely, if you are looking at an agenda for a candidate that's from the far-right, you're going to probably most likely find religious arguments and anti-choice arguments. It's very hard to find a liberal candidate today that will oppose abortion in all cases. It's just very rare. Not impossible, but it's rare.

- What have been the main turning points for the pro-life movement in Italy?

I would say what I already mentioned. If we start in the 2000s onwards, it's definitely the the Christian white nationalism and just the complete loss of what Christianity is and just the misuse of any type of religion, really, not just Christianity, to just defend their moral discourse, that it's really, really immoral. I think they know that they cannot really justify their positions from a science point of view.

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What they claim is just not true in any kind of, you know, any OBGYN or gynaecologist will debunk what they are saying. So I guess this is the only thing that they can use because it is just about beliefs and about morals. So how can you fight that if it's not evidence-based? It's just about beliefs.

So yeah, I think that was a very smart move on their part. I think they realised that that was powerful and that it worked. So yeah, I think that's the biggest change from before the 90s versus now.

I am fascinated by Italy because I well, as I said, I work globally, but I've been to Italy for work a couple of times. It's fascinating because I've met with like such radical feminists that are extremely, you know, inspiring and even like, well, some of them very radical in their positions, but then you can just, it's just about walking down the street. You immediately find multiple, just like religious imagery and politicians and authorities that it looks like it's not even the same country. Yeah, I've worked with the Vatican directly and with some ambassadors for the Holy See, and it's just like, they don't even speak the same language. So yeah, it's just very fascinating how informed some people are, and especially young people, like in their 20s or their 30s versus people that are in power and they're like over 60, over 70 years old. It's the dichotomy, it's just radical. It's very impressive how the cultural impact that the Catholic Church has over Italy is just so deep.

Yeah, I think it's impossible to ignore that that has a priority in where Italy stands with abortion. I consider that law, the Italian law in abortion, extremely restrictive. There is not even like right to abortion, it's just right to practise the, like, like, in fact, there is not the right of abortion when you read this law, there is more like practise that is kind of acceptable, but yes, it's really restrictive.

Yeah, yeah, it's very impressive that some Latin American countries have much more liberal laws than Italy. Yeah, it's crazy. Yeah, exactly, yeah. So the very first day of Trump's presidency, the very first thing he did was sign an executive order that said that all abortion clinics cannot be attacked if the anti-choice protester wants to do it.

It used to exist, Biden had put an executive order that said oh there must be at least 100 feet, or like I want to say like 30 metres, or at least 30 metres between the protesters and a clinic. Now that doesn't exist, that protection doesn't exist, so patients of clinics can like openly be attacked

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when they're trying to enter a clinic. That was the very first thing he did, and just yeah, from then until today, just every day something new that they come up with.

I recently drove, I live in Washington DC, so I recently drove from DC to Georgia, that's like nine hours, and to the south. And you have to go through many like states and highways, and I saw at least a dozen of like billboards, like this behind, saying like, I don't know, just this awful messages about Jesus and how you have to repent, or you're going to hell, protect President Trump, and it was just a bunch of like so violent and ugly messages that people pay for. These are like publicity that people, private people buy and pay for, and it's just really scary.

They're just like in power now, so they can say that. Yeah, and of course the other barriers that I'm sure you know that they love to do is just like kind of, if they can't, if they can't ban abortion completely, what they do is just like, oh before an abortion can be performed, then there's a mandatory sonogram. Make the mother listen to their heartbeat before, that is, you know, an important barrier. Yes. That also delays the care, because you can't get an abortion until you can get an appointment for a sonogram, and stuff like that. Just like any barrier they can find to delay care as much as possible.



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9. Interview n°9

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

Well, it has certainly finally removed the penalty for abortion, so it put an end to clandestine abortion in the 80s, for all the 80s finally women did not risk their lives for abortion and they did not have to go to France to get their right, for example. Then emigrations remained because when France had the virus, women went to France anyway, but oh well. Let's say that the 1978 law was a good start. And where to learn the law, because in the 1994 law it does not say the right of abortion. Exactly.

Yes. I want to make a right of self-determination. Yes, this thing, let's say, clearly does not exist in Italy. Indeed, even the title of the law itself speaks of protection of maternity, it does not speak of the right of abortion, even if in fact it was a consequence, the possibility of abortion in safety was not the focus. So it disciplined it, it put acceptable boundaries for the entire Italian community, also the Catholic one, also the one that does not deny the idea of abortion, but at least it found a starting point that is acceptable to most Italian opinions. It is an important point of Italian opinion on this subject.

Yes, it is important, but in the sense that that historical moment was a bit of a miracle and certainly the fact that women died of clandestine abortion helped to make this law. Today that clandestine abortion happens with pills, the risk of life is lower. If today I did this survey on the opinions, I do not know how it would go, because I also talk to people on the street when maybe I did the firm collection, some people have a very strong opinion, but also moderate, but maybe they have also accompanied their friends to abort as young people and then after 50 years they become against abortion because they think that as young people they had made a mistake.

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Even women who have aborted and then regretted it would like to remove the possibility of abortion from everyone because they think that maybe all other people would also make the same mistake as they did. There are really many positions.

There is this question in Italy that those who do activism ask to correct the law, to make a more modern law that focuses on the right to abortion, on the right to self-determination clearly and strongly, but I do not know if the Italian community would need to do a study on a big change, also because Italy changes a lot from Milan to Palermo, the suburbs, the city center are actually very differen

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

It is not homogeneous, but they are good at finding a way to work together, which is also the positive quality that the right has had to create a coalition government that, even if it is not homogeneous, is strong. This is a quality that the opposition lacks.

The same left-center, in addition to having internal divisions, does not always manage to work together with the feminist movement. So there is also this thing that the left-centre, which could potentially be the political coalition that protects abortion, also contains political opponents against abortion. In short, it is difficult for the pro-abortion world to be able to unite well, while within the feminist movement there is a strong desire to unite different realities, so maybe the feminists of the 60s, 70s, who try to collaborate with the young feminists of today, who take a form of the feminist collective, mostly with young age, very interested in the rights of the queer community. In short, they try to make a strong network, pro-choice, but the political part, in my opinion, is missing a bit. The political part is very important for this right in Italy. It is essential because, just as the anti-choice movements are doing, you can't think about changing things just by going to the square, organizing events. You have to make a political strategy and work on all levels. The no-choice movement is doing it. It is strong for this, in addition to having the money.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?
- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

As soon as the law was passed, this movement for life was born. They immediately opened the first centers for help with difficult maternity care, mainly by connecting to churches and parishes. They gave out handkerchiefs and dresses. They were present when a person had



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doubts and wanted to keep it, but didn't have the money. Even doctors in small towns talked to the woman, who wasn't very convinced, and told her to go to the center and they would give her the handkerchiefs. When a person is in a fragile situation, they enter that door and receive disinformation. So they immediately organized themselves to intercept the fragile woman, and try to guide her towards the choice they want, before listening to the woman and discovering the choice she wants. This is a fact. This is something that has always been there over the years, together with the promotion of the culture of stigma, the spread of the idea that abortion is a murder, that the woman who does it is wrong, that it is a bad thing. The entire Catholic Church is involved in this. Lately, this message has been strengthened.

New anti-abortion centers have been added, which have a more aggressive policy, they are moving in a civil sphere, so they do politics with the parties, they have lobbied. So now the issue has been strengthened, but some things have always been there.

There are links that have also been exposed in Italy. So there are links with Forza Nuova. But if we look at recent times, there have been some elections in the regions of Italy, for example in Umbria, and we have seen the signing of the anti-choice manifesto by the candidates of the center. So they are expanding from extreme right to right, to the right, to the center. In the anti-abortion movement there are also exponents of the liberal right, Forza Italia, which is the party that was of Berlusconi. Despite the daughter of Berlusconi, who is very much loved by those who follow Forza Italia, publicly said that the rights are important, and she feels almost more left-wing than right-wing for the approach.

So I would say that within Forza Italia some people are for free abortion insurance, others in the anti-abortion movement. What is the problem? I also talked to people from Forza Italia, in the brands. I said that we must be careful because abortion is becoming a matter of right against left, and it should not become this. They told me, yes, we are for free and safe abortion, we are in line with the ideology of Marina Berlusconi, but then when it came time to talk about abortion, these people did not do it, they did not defend abortion.

Why? Because in power, in the brand region, there are people who listen to the anti-abortion lobby. So abortion for them is not a strong enough argument to create problems in the party, to say, guys, if you are against abortion, I will leave the party.

It is a second-level argument compared to other political arguments, also because there is the question that abortion is a bad thing to do. That is, the mentality of stigma, in my opinion, in

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the right is present. So they are not ashamed and do not fight for abortion. Maybe if there was a vote to say no, closed in the electoral booth, maybe they would protect abortion. But they do not do it in public. And this is a problem and makes abortion a topic only of the left and of the left also sometimes radical. Because the left of the center does not want to lose the Catholic electorate. In the sense of anti-abortion lobbying, for example, in the regional level you have different realities. Different realities of the anti-abortion movement.

But in the end, my feeling is that they work to connect the Catholic world with the right-wing political world. When I was in my hometown, I took part in a meeting. It was during a meeting of an anti-abortion activist. The meeting was organized by the party of Giorgia Meloni, section of that part of the territory. They invited the groups of the parish to participate. They gave out handkerchiefs and clothes.

So they all met together. And they were really happy about this alliance between the world of the party and the world of the parish. And as guests there were also Italian parliamentarians. A city that has no political meaning, which is not the capital of the region. It is a small city, 40,000 inhabitants. They hosted a senator and a parliamentarian together with a crowd of 30-50 people from the city, who were those of the church and those who vote for Giorgia Meloni and have the card of the party of Giorgia Meloni. And they were talking about this creation of an alliance between the two worlds. So this is a strategy that is still happening in the outskirts of Italy. That these two worlds come together, which actually started to come together a few years ago. But in short, it is still happening in the smaller cities. This is one thing. Then the strategies that they apply are national.

Indeed, I would say global. Do you have different levels of strategies? Yes, certainly the strategy of the movement reaches the high levels. And then it is indicated to the outskirts.

For example, in advertising, they prepare everything and then send everything to the outskirts with the instructions. But the concept, the strategy of advertising is made at the national level by the competent people. So there is an Italian central brain, professional, capable, connected to Europe, connected to the rest of the West, etc. Who works for the media campaigns, prepares everything and then uses the force of the outskirts to be the leader in bringing the message. This is something they do on people. At the same time, they have a communication strategy and relations with health personnel. So gynecologists, doctors in hospitals, in constructions, who are invited to participate in the events of these life-saving centers. And in any case, the health personnel, when they have a woman who wants to keep the child, the pregnancy, is sent to these



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centers also by pro-choice health personnel. Because they are pro-choice, but they are not feminist activists. So they care that if the woman needs diapers, she can take them. Since there is no other choice, in the end those who give the diapers are the anti-choice. Women are sent by them. This creates a positive reputation of life-saving centers in the territory. All the families that have received gifts from them become their supporters. So public opinion becomes an ally of the life-saving centers. The health personnel, however, keeps this resource. Slowly they are creating a fabric for which people do not want to go against them.

- What were the major turning point for pro-life movement in Italy?

Well, surely 2019 is an important year. Because it is when there was the meeting in Verona. And on Berlusconi too. The shift of politics and Berlusconi with Navarro.

In my opinion, perhaps the first was Gasparri. Gasparri was the first to become part of the anti-choice movement. But looking at the data, Gasparri promoted legal personality for the embryo. So he wanted a person born by law to be equal to an embryo. To create a conflict between woman and the embryo. He has been doing this for the last five years. Every year he presented this bill for a long time. But I can't tell you the exact year when he became part of the anti-abortion movement. But surely an acceleration happened in 2019. After 2019, what were the main turning points for this movement? Well, I'm not an expert on this. But surely when they managed to put Meloni in power, it was a turning point for them. Because they began to enter the system of Italian laws.

But they had more access to the PNRR, therefore to the European funds. Then this thing, before being national, was also regional. That is, when they were not yet in power with Meloni.

However, in the local territories, Piedmont, Marche, they were already present. And the regions were already doing things. For example, in my city, the agreement between the national health system and the church association was made in 2008. So Marche have a strong history of right-wing and anti-abortion. And already 10-11 years before the national meeting, they were doing it. And I would say that Marche have a strong history of anti-abortion since the 11th year. Yes, even before. Because in Marche there is still a problem of mentality for this issue. In fact, it is also the region that uses less abortion with pills. But the problem was also during the left-central government.



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10. Interview n°10

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

Yes, it has influenced it a lot, first of all, by demonstrating how a law, a legislative instrument, has the effect to indicate how well what it allows, the activity that is the object of its procedure. The law 194 is entitled as protection of maternity. As protection of maternity and how it has well affirmed the health of the woman.

In reality, precisely for this effect, let's say on the value level, that a law produces in a social body, in essence, has legalised abortion, far beyond, let's say, the intentions of those who voted for it. And this shows how before enacting a law, first of all, you have to think about what is the good that is indicated. Because, in fact, the law 194, although it indicates how well it protects maternity, has ended up being an instrument to say that maternity is a thing, is a dimension that is substantially negative or, in any case, left to the mere subjective will of the woman, neglecting in a very serious way the reality of life, what is the reality of conception.

And the law 194 then affirmed that abortion should not be a means of contraception, but in reality, it has made abortion above all a means of contraception. Even in this case, putting in a very subordinated level, let's say subordinated, attention the attention to a life which is the life of a child who has been born in the maternal womb. So, the law 194 has greatly lowered the valorization of fragile life substantially introducing the delivery of the birth as if it were an available good an available good in favour of the adult.



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- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

The Pro-Life movement in Italy is a pluralistic movement articulated. The term Italian faction recalls a concept of counterposition which does not seem adequate to the reality of Italian Pro-Life. The Pro-Life movement sees different ways different sensitivities for all defences of life. So for the truth there is a lot of dialogue also between different components in the panorama of Italian Pro-Life associations. So there is no counterposition. There is a diversity of approach of interest we could say.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

Strategies, durations... So let's see I'll try to speak for example there are some experiences that are now 50 years old when this year we celebrate correct term 50 years of presence of the Life Assistance Centres and of the Italian Pro-Life movement founded by Carlo Casini.

By the way, I am also vice-president national of the Italian Pro-Life movement. This is the Italian Pro-Life movement can be defined as a and it is based on a concrete commitment of about 10,000 people. The numbers are always very relative because there are more than 350 people in Italy in all Italian provinces and there are about 10,000 volunteers.

Volunteers, in the face of mothers, of women, who in the most diverse situations of difficulty or abandonment, ask for help to be able to end pregnancy. So it is a presence of concrete help, which is then developed also, concrete help that is made of human company, in which, during the course of life, they deal with various problems. Often they also give hospitality to women in particular situations of difficulty, until accompanying them to delivery, and even after.

Because after delivery, for example, there are tools such as the GEMMA Foundation, which give small economic aid, and then there is an accompaniment, perhaps, to find some labour system or animal services. So it is a concrete human help, which in these years has helped about a million women. Then, allowing the birth, on the basis of the desire of women, of about 300,000 children.

So these are important numbers. Then, let's say, there have been years in which the pro-life movement has also experienced very significant moments of public demonstrations. We are talking about the years until 2016, the famous Family Day, which gathered millions of people, each of them, so it was crazy.



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We also have a meeting with the Pope for this anniversary and this strategy is based on concrete help of volunteers towards mothers and women who in the most different situations of difficulty or abandonment: there is presence of concrete help which is also based on human company in which the Life Assistance Centres deal with various problems and often give hospitality to women in particular situations of difficulty in which there is an accompaniment to find labor or animal services. So it is a concrete human help which in these years has helped about a million women allowing birth based on the desire of women.

Then there have been some years in which the pro-life movement has also experienced some moments of very significant : we are talking about the years until 2016 the famous Family Day which gathered millions of people each one so it was then comes what Pope Francis calls the change of age that is, the vertical basically total in Italian society of a common that is, a widespread culture of life protection. So it was quite consolidated the idea that life was always a good, meritorious, true, of absolute value even if the law of 194 was already in place and at that point let's say the pro-life movement differentiates their positioning in the sense that they probably struggle to understand the change of age on which the Holy Magisterium is powerful.

I have been recalling it since 2015 a speech made at the Italian Bishop in Florence in 2015, and then they proceed with keys a little with assertivesometimes even vindictive, of the need to protect absolute values, in particular in reference to the city of life, of the family, of freedom of education.

But this type of language, in my opinion, progressively loses the ability to make us listen to Italian society. For some, therefore, there is a radicalisation of positions, for others, on the other hand, their watered-down, basically giving up a lot of land, on important issues, but that cover a little, but also the Catholic world, themes such as environmentalism, participation and solidarity, serious and important things, but as if they were a little weakened. Let's say, in fact, our very modest experience is born, and the name means it, that is, an attempt to understand more thoroughly the challenge of the change of times, that is, a society that no longer has a cultural reference, founded, let's say, or spread.

And so this involves, for us, including on the level of reasons, the reasonableness of the defence, also of the defence of life, as well as of the defence of the family, of freedom of education, as well as other teachings of the social magisterium. In order to be able to dialogue on the level of reasons, even with cultures that have, let's say, perhaps, yes, they explicitly oppose this defence,



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especially the radical culture, which, however, takes more and more steps, especially in the left-wing parties. This is a relatively new phenomenon in Italy.

That is, when I often go around, I bring with me a dialogue from 1995 between Massimo D'Alema, who at the time was the secretary of the left Democratic Party, and Carlo Casini, and both agreed to defend life always, even on the subject of euthanasia, even D'Alema said otherwise. And today this would no longer happen, so there is no longer that conviction, more or less perhaps rhetorical, which prevailed until 20 years ago, no, almost 10 years ago, for which life was always protected. Now it is about re-understanding the reasons and re-proposing them to everyone, so the idea, let's say, on the teeth of the situation that the Gospel of Matthew 10.23 indicates that we must be able to say something that is public and conclusive.

Now, our attempt is this, to understand which conceptions, so we think that there are several human conceptions in the temporal age. One of these is a conception of the human, an anthropology, which founds its own level of value of life. We, let's say, we try to document it, if you want, you can go to www.tempi.org, there is a series of interviews, there is this identification, that is, a conception of the human, according to which, let's say, the only criterion of value is the so-called principle of self-determination, which is perhaps clearer, but it is assumed as unique, with the consequence that, when, in the experience of fragility, as the lay saint underlines, the German philosopher, for example, Bung-Chul-An, Bung-Chul-An, there is fragility, it gives the limit, and therefore also the disease, these obviously lose their value.

That is, there is a nihilist proposal, fragility has no value, only the success, in essence, of self-determination in the sense of performance. Now, it seems very important to me to document, choose and understand that this is often the indirect level of human value that is affirmed, especially through so much rhetoric of the so-called rights, which, in fact, are composed in this single preface of value. Now, it is clear that in this dynamic, valorial, psychological, Hi Marco, let me finish with this doctorate that is doing a research on the pro-life movement in Italy, Dr. D'Agostini has arrived, and I was saying, it is clear that here, at this point, the alternative, if you want the alternative, but in the sense of recognising, instead, at every moment of life, an absolute value.

Why? Because we start from the observation of a question in man of meaning, of fullness, of fulfilment, let's call it, hopefully, in a jubilant way, that manifests itself in any condition the person is in, in any latitude, and above all, in the circumstances of the limit, the limit, we perceive it as such, precisely because there is a point, a guide, what we have, if you want to see



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the festival of the whole human being that we did last year, we identified in that red dot the image of that wonderful French artist, I have to play in his house almost, who is Matisse, the painter Piccaruso and Matisse, who paints a figure of himself, a human figure of himself, that would fall to the ground, instead, that red dot, I say, it is integral to the festival. And this, let's say, we propose a point of recognition of the human being, let's say, not mortal, and therefore, that it founds the respect, also from the point of view of power, of the unavailability of life. Let's say, this allows, we believe, to read many phenomena from the theme of the non-protection of the birth life, to the non-protection of the fragile life, to the sick life, to all the controversies, the euthanasic claims that Italy, in particular, carried out under an important spotlight in all the regions.

And I also believe that very beautiful and very interesting dialogues also with the lay culture and therefore, the attempt is this, that is, to learn and re-say, re-propose this perspective of reason, this perspective of reason. And this path seems more interesting, and also more suitable, compared to the mere assertion, let's say, of oral categories. These are absolutely unjustified, but they no longer understand immediately, often not even by themselves, nor by me.

And moreover, with the risk of playing the game of a culture very supported by the mainstream that would like to relegate life and many other components that believe in this, in a kind of cage of the zoo, as a way of destination for the zoo of the world. Instead, we believe that the discovery of the human being is, instead, a language a language understood by everyone and that everyone somehow can understand it and can talk about it. It's a very complicated discussion, what I did in Chiesa Oscura, but it's mostly what I was asked.

If this attempt will be structural or not, we'll see. But, in short, these years, for example, Marco has brought a book that we have just published on environmental issues, so we deal with everything, but they are not necessarily in question, let's say, classically linked to the land of life, for example, the land of motherhood. But, in fact, in these years we have traced about, in the end, on the proposals that, based on based on this approach that I mentioned, gradually we offer the decision-makers about forty norms let's say more or less directly inspired by Hebrew.

We see that when we are united, because then this work on contents and reasons facilitates a lot also the unitary convergence also from different positions and helps sensitively a greater attention from the decision-makers, especially from the National Parliament of the Government, but also from the regions, so we place ourselves in this dialogue propositional with the directors, with the decision-makers. And also a lot transversal, we all see that the facts say that there is a



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need to be more careful but there are also many exceptions also in the left-wing, so we have to make some mechanistic changes. Every time we offer it to everyone.

- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

This is also difficult to say, but I think, also because in this we are very encouraged by the Magisterium of ESCOVI and the Holy See that the influence goes in the direction of re-learning the reasons, to learn, to read, which is today a challenge on the human conception that uses a lot the laws of power, because as we said at the beginning, the laws of the norm, of the jurisprudence influence the correct mentality. They are the only laws, obviously, of the proletariat movement.

But also these have a weight in this sense, they are not just a technical fact. So I think, and I answer this question, that they influence the sense of pushing all of us to re-understand the level of the challenge, a challenge on the human conception, on anthropology, and consequently to indicate the reasons why one conception of the human is more or less reasonable than the other. When you start from the idea that only self-determination gives value, it is clear that the rhetoric of rights ends up in the culture of waste, because fragility, they have no value, and consequently they are marginalised, abandoned.

On the other hand, an anthropology that starts to recognise the desire, the question of meaning, this creates ties, so the relationship becomes an important stage of development, while in the other option the relationship is a link and therefore it is cut, in fact in many laws it is understood that they cut the relationship or manipulate it as biotechnics does. In this second anthropological option the relationship acquires value and in every circumstance of life it is worthy of care and companionship. The palliatives develop more and the direction of the decision I believe that we are encouraged to research, to think that this is an extraordinary time because perhaps as in other periods of history the novelty of Christianity manifests itself as a greater humanity, a greater capacity of reasonableness for everyone because then when one has to think about himself or his character, whether he prefers to be received or cured in the disease or neglected, everyone gives the answer if he thinks it is more reasonable.

So in this sense it is a very beautiful and exciting challenge that allows us to live in a very full and aware way as protagonists of our time. Thank you very much.



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- What were the major turning point for pro-life movement in Italy?

Well, let's say the birth of the Pro-Life movement in 1975, the two Family Days, and then in January the first Roman festival of our life.

11. Interview n°11

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

I mean, because Italy is a bit of a strange country, because the 1994 law, like other laws in Italy, actually came after a sentence of the Constitutional Court, taking into account that Italy lived after the Republic and the Constitution, a moment in which the Republic, not that it was not able to assert itself, but the Constitution was almost unable to be acted on, in the sense that there were principles. Still, then they were not brought into the ordinary law. And what happened is that this, if you need, for example, references, Rodotama said it, Bobbio also said it, various personalities said it, that they found it difficult to act on the Constitution. So, at a certain point, the Constitutional Court was asked, and above all the Constitutional Court, to respect some principles that had not been consolidated. I believe that the law on abortion, that is, the 1994 law, in that regard, because they are all reforms that were made in the 1970s, also starting from the sentence of the Constitutional Court.

And I tell you this because the principle that was in the sentence before the 194 law, the one that also led to having to make the law, was that it was not possible to privilege the life of a person who is not there, that is, of an unborn child, compared to a person who already exists, that is, the woman. Because the problem was if the woman, in pregnancy, could have problems, perhaps even at the risk of life. And for the Italian order, it was not possible to privilege a legal subjectivity that does not exist, because the birth does not exist. For the Italian law, this is

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something that often in the Italian anti-abortion movement is not underlined enough, if I'm not mistaken, that the legal subject for the Italian law is only when it exists, when it is born. If it is not born, it does not exist. Therefore, a law had to be made.

But when it was done, obviously with all the battles that were around that law, it was decided more or less how to write it. The problem is that it was also done through referendums. And in particular, the second one, I think it is the one of the 80s, in which there were both requests from the For Life movement to completely cancel 194, which was the law that they put, a maximalist one, to eliminate 194, which was met with the principle that the Constitutional Court had already given it, and that is that it could not be abolished, because it would have created a legal void on a principle already established by the Constitutional Court in a sentence of the Constitutional Court.

And that battle was lost, because they proposed another request, which was reductive, let's say, which, however, was rejected, as well as, at the same time, a particularly radical request, which instead tried to extend 194. In the end, not even that was passed, and we have 194 as it was defined in 1976.

The point is this, especially for the developments, that is, if 194 gives rights to women, to the possibility of voluntarily interrupting pregnancy, at the same time, let's say, it is still a battlefield, but it has created a different work within the anti-abortion movements because Movimento per la Vita at that point already knew that it could not completely cancel 194 and that it could not even go into total imposition, because it was part of a structure, a public structure, a state structure, in which they could not act by going against everything. Instead, if they returned in the years 2000 and later, they created a feeling of distrust on the part of the anti-abortion movement, which would have wanted to completely cancel 194. But this is not possible.

At the same time, on the other hand, there is a moment of stalemate, let's say, because the feminist movements that ask for more powers have seen the law 40 arrive, which has in any case given meaning to reproductive rights, to rights on sexual health, because it was a law that suddenly within the text not only disciplined the foetus medically assisted, but gave dignity to the birth, before it was born, because at a certain point it seemed that the legal subject could be the foetus. And so this created confusion. Then on this, law 40 was modified by the Constitutional Court, so it became another text compared to what it is now, because in some parts it is not abolished. But it remains a battlefield, and in my opinion it revolves around this

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concept, for example, which is critically relevant, of what the legal subject of Italy is. I don't know if I answered, but I think this is it. It is very important your argument, because the authors told me that Law 194 is not specific to the rights of abortion, but they did not explain the juridical aspects of it.

That's what the law of 194 says. In my opinion, the point, the question is I think that if you have to modify the 194 law, there is a real fact that getting involved in the 1994 at this time is very dangerous. At the same time, it is clear that it has limits if we want, because in the meantime years have passed, decades have passed and it should also be reviewed in light of what have been some social and cultural changes.

I think it can be dangerous precisely because you have to understand what is going on. Because I think that in Italy talking about reproductive rights and everything that has to do with the field of sexuality is very complex because there are many things at stake and there are many parties at stake but because there is no longer a political lucidity in knowing how to protect eventually not the bodies and the people but precisely what is the functioning of the law. I think it should still be improved and extended because however one of the points of the 194 that should be discussed in my opinion is precisely the fact that the 194 brings in itself the two years because it is still a compromise and this is what they have always made an emphasis on.

Yes, on the one hand also the movement for life, but initially it was also one of the points of the march for life instead of focussing on the fact that the 194 brings in itself the dissuasion, inside there is the dissuasion and therefore a kind of discipline of women's bodies who decide to voluntarily interrupt pregnancy this should be discussed because it should be a law designed to protect women's bodies and women's choices but it is a very complex thing because it would need political support that perhaps is missing plus a part of public opinion aware and above all because we are inclined from all the other things. After that, in my opinion, it should be changed it should be modified as other laws have been blocked in the 70s and on which no steps have been taken and I say this with more reason because in the meantime the discussions have become complicated and law 40 remains one of the problems that we have not only from the factual point of view of the order but also from the point of view of interpretation of all the matters that have to do with productive rights sexual rights because they have created an ambiguity a confusion compared to some details that can allow us to improve the 194 what happened in Italy in the last 30-40 years was also a bit of a stalemate compared to what should have been thought of as the advancements of a republic. Because the truth is that there is still



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an attempt of compromise, of dialogue between the various parts of Italy regarding what we want to do with a constitution that is not clear when it has been implemented and when it hasn't. I say this because, in addition to the issue of sexual and reproductive rights, it is the same issue that, in my opinion, has to do with marriage, because the battle for equal marriage in Italy is blocked in relation to what we do with the constitution. One of the questions is what we do with the constitutional principles and how these constitutional principles are linked to these issues. We need a strong political will, which is probably missing at the moment.

I think, compared to the battles, for example, of the 1970s, where the Radical Party, rightly or wrongly, used a series of tools to underline the freedom of people. And this is missing at the moment. It is missing both on the left and on the right, even if there is no strong left, both in the most moderate wings. Because in the end, the laws of the 1970s were also made with an acceptance by the Christian democracy of a series of principles of action in the constitution. The Christian democracy was not in agreement at the time, as it was not for all the laws on divorce and so on.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

It is definitely divided into different factions. The point is that it has changed over time, because the movement for life, the movement for life that was born in the 70s, which is obviously close to the battle for 194, and all the discussions around it, was born with the help centres for life, which were used to counter the voluntary interruption of pregnancy, but with centres that help maternity.

But they are not really for maternity, but they try to block abortion. It was a kind of trap that they tried to put, occupying a space, and this continued, because the movement for life was born, which occupied the space of abortion for many years, but becoming institutional, because it had political exponents who had a political career, Carlo Casini in particular, but also linked to the Vatican, who remained institutional and therefore did not go to the direct clash. This has always created memories.

If this was the strong point, obviously there were other directions in other subjects, in other people or other associations, which did not have not only institutionalisation in itself, but also the fact that they were soft, as a kind of dialogue towards the institutions, which was of acceptance of a state of fact. Because then the main question is, for example, if I have a law

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that is difficult to discard, because there are constitutional principles, then at that point there is something that does not go in the Republic, and in fact these subjects are the ones that can also put into discussion. There have been monarchical subjects like Roberto de Mattei, there have been characters that also come from a political history that put into discussion the Republic. Then, in the 2000s, a bit for some lost battles, for example, the idea that Europe should have Christian roots, which was a debate that was quite strong in those environments. So how much the institutionalised, democratic society was based on a religious and catholic subject. So it put into discussion also the social functioning.

That was a lost battle, there was the Law 40, which gave a new momentum to other political subjects, science for life, now I can't remember the name, where Massimo Gandolfini was born, he brought you to create in some way a movement that was against the movement for life. He took the public scene effectively with the March for Life and therefore with a whole world linked to a politics a bit more extreme right than right, and in my opinion it's not a coincidence. Also the political position regarding the fact that the confrontation with the Law 194 is also a confrontation with the institutions. These subjects, who were tired of the calm, the movement for life, of Carlo Casini's omnipresence, of the commission with politics and the Vatican, started to protest, they created the March for Life, the Women's Day, and they did it in fact, in my opinion, putting into discussion the shared rules at the social level. Not only the Laws, but also the effect produced by the Laws. They started to protest directly against the Law 194. We can't accept that the Law 194 goes well, but it has to be attached to the totem, which technically could not be done, but it's a will of social change, which is a more biased way. In fact, the March for Life has been disbanded, for some reasons. Many different groups This has been further modified because now an umbrella of associations that manage the March for Life has been created. The March for Life has changed again in the last 3-4 years, because now it's called Manifestation for Life, Choose Life, where the main character of the March for Life, together with Rui Yu, are the two spokespersons of the Manifestation for Life. They are new subjects, but in fact the March for Life does not exist. At the same time, when this thing was created, they took a step back and stopped going directly against the Law 194, because they started to dialogue not only with the police, but also with a more institutionalised environment, having a background within some political forces that can accept a certain type of speech, presenting it in a different way.



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- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

Ok, she has done a good research, she has also written very interesting articles on the March for Life, for example, because she worked on the March for Life, because in the March for Life among the various strategies that she had adopted, there was this thing of looking for help for life, so a speech based on carrying on maternity rather than trying to limit or prevent the evolutionary introduction of childbirth. So the strategy of the March for Life has always been to privilege the speech on maternity. So it helps you to carry on a maternity project even when you don't think of having it, basically. And Martina underlines that, for example, many of the women who turned to the March for Life were not Italian, they were not white, they were people who did not have the means to carry on a pregnancy in Italy and they turned to the March for Life. So they carried on a maternity project of women who were not recognised by the State, strangely enough, for political reasons.

Martina says it's a bit strange because, on the other hand, the strategies and interventions by the subjects who went against the March for Life were those of initially having a rhetoric against the 194, so the March for Life was born against the 194 directly even if that was the point, the debate that Francesco Spagnoli had opened on the paper so we're doing it here.

Can you say you're against the 194? Openly? And this is what they did. Now they have changed it because they have brought a model, in my opinion, that comes from France, from the Manifigus, where the discourse is presented in a different way, in part from France, that is, to change the communicative register, no longer to be against but to be for something else.

And this is, I believe, from France, but not only from France, but also from the United States, where the battle also on the terminology is fundamental, for which there is no anti-abortion, it is for life. And to underline this aspect, but hiding the real violence acted by these subjects in the control of the bodies and the rights of others and of the will, which should be protected in some way. They hide it, but in fact, now it is the most evident part, because you can't always fight against, because at some point it doesn't work socially.

And when they introduced the Manifestation for Life in recent years, if you read their messages, they say it, we are not against anyone, we are not against anything, we are for, so they say for



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something, but then, after the first paragraph in which they tell you this, they immediately tell you about an enemy. An enemy that doesn't have a face, an enemy that is not concrete, but it is a culture of death. But in reality, the enemy is identified and whoever wants to understand understands, but it is no longer the law, a certain political party that can want a battle on the introduction of a threat, maybe extending it, improving it, and it is the same thing, but in fact they are also trying in Italy, because the political background they found, as it can be done in Italy itself. Then they use different strategies that they are importing from the United States, which is the Foetus Battle, which are all strategies of dissuasion, even violent from a psychological point of view, or to make a lever on the objection of consciousness, which is one of the strong points in Italy, and therefore try to limit not only the presence of doctors on the territory, for whom we know, these are the real battles that are then also conducted by the feminist movement, by the various feminist movements on the widening of the presence of doctors. There are regions where there are few doctors compared to the requests, or places are given that are not suitable, and the other is the presence within hospitals, committees, or maybe they are retired from the regions that present themselves as committees that help to carry out a project, a maternity project, but in reality they are projects that are really very strong, so doing it in another way, but with a facade that actually hides an aggressiveness that has increased in recent years. Then the strategies have also been the concealment of a political project that before was not less violent, because it was as much as the movement for life, but that we were doing a little more with a series of assumptions that instead want to be skipped.

ProVita, but in fact, look, I think it is very interesting from this point of view to say that ProVita, the same ProVita All. The one that was ProVita All, which now is called ProVita and Family, was not actually born as ProVita, this is the funny thing, but it was born as ProLife, because they had taken that strategy directly. And in my opinion, that little thing, because for a short moment they were not called ProVita, they were called ProLife, it came from a feeling, from a feeling, because it was said ProLife, without indicating anything to anyone, because we took it from the United States, and that's it. But clearly, it is an attempt to legitimise compared to a way of presenting oneself.

And I tell you, I tell you this little thing that I have never written, but it's funny, which is a strategy, for example, to present oneself, because ProVita, when it was born, and I'm only talking about ProVita, but then it can be worth a little for everyone, but ProVita, for example, when it was born, it was called ProLife News, because it was a newspaper, then it becomes Notizia e ProVita in Italian, and then it becomes ProVita News, and then ProVita Familia, but

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when it is born, and they still have it, it is the name of those who cannot speak, so it is the name of a life that exists, but that cannot speak.

It is an attempt, precisely, not to say that we are against, but we are in defence of people who do not exist, but who cannot speak, but who exist in some way, because it is the nascent life, etc., but who record a video, that is, those who cannot speak were also, in the experience of Tori Brandi, who was the founder and president of ProVita, were also the people who died, so they were people who were there, but who are no longer there, because they were killed by the Soviet regime, and he did it, it was For Those Who Cannot Speak, so it was the same thing, he did it in a video when the Soviet Union was falling, he was committed, he created this group in London, of people who went to Lithuania, because Lithuania had become the first country that was taking independence from the Soviet Union, and for a speech against the Soviet Union, they had made this video that opened with this sentence, which is the same of ProVita, which is so funny, which was to try to oppose the Soviet Union, and it seems a stupid thing, but it links things, in the sense that it gives a political meaning, because the strategy is the same, in a way, and this enemy is always the same, and it has to do with, and here I come back to that point, because it has to do with, in fact, the word values, those who want to be the values of a society. In my opinion, the fact that ProVita ProVita, but the whole neocatholic movement, is because, I say this politically, but I insist on this point, is that the real battle now, about why the far-right are winning, is the fact that you are brought up in a different society, and you can imagine, they give you a perspective. The question of the interruption of your will to live is that it is inserted inside a possible society to think the values that are different from those that have decided to die, because going against the 194 means going against the Constitution, going against a sentence of the Constitutional Court is not the same the battle that is being fought in the United States has led to the real focus of the speech on the interruption of the will of pregnancy, which are the sentences of the Constitutional Court of the United States, that is, of the Supreme Court. It is what has always changed, because it was reversed, because they are the values on which we decide to form a society, but they say it, they say it openly, and the question is sometimes strong because it has to do with this, it has to do with what kind of society we want, and with what they propose.

It is a bit like the left, or whatever, in the political parties that maybe would like to protect or expand the 194, for example, but it is the idea of what kind of society we want, not only in defence of the existing, but what kind of society we want to continue to build, to think, to

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imagine, because what is being done is probably also the ability to imagine a new society where people are protected on one side and free on the other.

- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

It was not another movement. It was made up of volunteers, but it was a movement that moved in institutions and created one of us, a whole series of structures that addressed the European Parliament, the European Union in general. What happened is that other synergies were created by the neo-Catholic movement for example, which are both on a European level and a more global level. Also, they moved on the trail of those that were the conferences of women, and the work of the Vatican, but separating from the Vatican and doing it differently.

So a whole series of subjects that find a commonality not necessarily in the society they imagine, because maybe they start from a different value system, from different principles, but that certainly agree in the restriction of an action that was recognized in time by Western societies and that is not shared.

Not only the protection of bodies, but also the possibility to act on bodies, the freedom to do with the body what you want, not only for the voluntary introduction of pregnancy, but also to decide the end of life, euthanasia, a whole series of subjects that have to do with the freedom of a person to act on his own body and then to act also with others, so not only with my body, but what kind of relationship my body can have with others, so the equal marriage, the genitality.

On this, the Italians managed to have a space, they imported it into models, creating synergies, also only for that, because the Manicutus imported the Manicutus with the will of the French Manicutus to expand, then it changed, but the Italians have always been, also because these battles have always been very strong in Italy, they have always had success in their social way.

It's more like how these strategies have been used, do we see a difference between the 70s and the present between a change of discourse, a change of foundation of movements which are based on the hypothesis of Massimo Praio, which would be more Neo-Catholic movements, did they change their strategy between the 70s and the present?

Yes, because they changed their modality not only of manifesting, but also of expanding technically, I don't know if it's completely true, but they certainly expanded the audience, they

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certainly presented themselves as a movement because there was a change of years and an evolution of the movement for life which led them to be institutionalised, but what has changed is that now there is a more popular discourse, so meanwhile they have changed the way of presenting themselves, they speak for the people, they have people who go down to the square with them, they have the signatures, the signatures of the petitions. They always have these numbers of which they speak, so already meanwhile this is less closed as a movement to battles, I don't know, of these referendums, of something that acts directly on the institutions, but that may be out of the way, for example, I started to learn because they copied, this is something that is now very studied, but they copied strategies that came from the left already in the 70s, which is an unfeasible thing, but not even in the 80s because I think that there were complicated years in Italy, because there was what is called a recluse, a backwardness of political interest towards political matter.

What has changed is that in the meantime the streets have taken, then I don't know if it's completely true, in the sense that I don't know how many people of their spontaneous will have adhered to the demonstrations because most of them were organised groups, they were people who already in some way were part of religious groups such as neo-cathedrals, maybe they would go down to the square because they were neo-cathedrals.

What has worked in these strategies has been to do this, to present themselves differently, to present themselves from an aesthetic point of view, communicative in a different way and they have managed to grasp, because this is the point, not only the interest of people but the interest of a new way of doing politics because if in the 70s you could dialogue with the political forces or with the Vatican itself then in some way the movement for life had privileged us and within the parties Carlo Casinìa has been a representative of the political party.

These instead have, in my opinion, Massimo says it well, started a strategy of exchange with politics and in my opinion this idea of exchange is absolutely relevant because they remain a movement they present you as a movement that remains a movement and parties make parties there is not a pure commission from this point of view, there is not a political representative of a party rather than another but there is an exchange but there is an exchange with a new political action which is different from what has been until that moment the set.

We have known the whole period of Berlusconi in which in some way there could be synergies but these themes were not at the centre of the discourse in such a strong way instead they have found an exchange with new political parties new not necessarily but renewed like the Lega,



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Prima. Then Fratelli d'Italia that have in common with these movements also some communicative strategies some political strategies for example a certain type of populism which is populism in the sense of an appeal to a people that does not know what it is from whom it is represented. What animates this people what is this people so a series of questions that come to the base but that work both in the Pro Vita movement in the Lega or in Fratelli d'Italia so this exchange works also because the political scenario has changed which has brought new political subjects to emerge in terms of parties especially the Berlusconi defeat of this Berlusconi that had in hand an Italian right that then did not have it anymore.

- What were the major turning point for pro-life movement in Italy?

The Constitutional Court the law 194 then it changes with the referendum of the 80s I don't remember if it was 1981 Anyway there was a change obviously through the divorce so those were the moments of change that created the movement for life the non-reinstitutional. Then there were the battles of the 90s which are a bit of a shift if you want but what changes is the face of the 2000s.

Meanwhile the Family Day impacts but above all I think this was an important moment the idea of the Christian roots everything that happened in that moment because it allowed because it was one of the questions opened by the one who became Papa Ratzinger was to try to understand how much Europe. But obviously, Italy needed to underline the Catholic origin of social life on the one hand to contrast what was in 2001 the question of Islam exploded because all that was terrorism but above all the theme of immigration and other religions that could pollute the Catholic roots that was a strong moment. In my opinion because it turns you not to deal with political strategies or to make a movement anti-apartheid but to deal with the cognitive framework let's say so hermeneutic of the question because around those things around also the real turn of the Vatican given by John Paul II to intervene publicly and therefore to become a real political subject within the world institutions that created a moment also synergistic not only among the Catholic movements. Because it raised some questions also within a piece of world let's say feminist that was questioned and respected when I say feminist I don't mean a real feminist but a character like Eugenia Rocella that came from feminism in the 70s but then reflected together with Lucia Tascaraffia to other women of the Catholic movement what the Catholic roots were then they used it above all as a discourse because that was the Italian discourse mainly not so much the question of voluntary introduction of pregnancy but it was the affolation of the assisted child but that was one of the questions crossed a little until it

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exploded. That debate was only their conclusion but it never happened and it opened not only to what we do of a non-Catholic society that we do it because we are Catholic but we think strongly about this. I remember for example Marcello Veneziani that was and is one of the main intellectuals he worked a lot on this he wrote books he thought about this as one of the main questions to discuss because it seemed a very important thing to talk about Catholic youth but not only what kind of society we are rejecting that we are convinced that it has always been like this it must simply be reversed and if you don't reverse it it's because you are changing something you want to change something so you go to the clash but then because on the other hand there was the fear and it crosses and it connects the battle it crosses everything that a Catholic model based on life can replace or even side another that starts from different assumptions and that they perceive as a model that can become hegemonic but different that can be that of Islam.

I say it because for example one of the main characters of the March for Life was Roberto de Mattei who worked a lot on this he was on the Lepanto committee he was part of the March for Life this speech also crossed the experience I believe that was a strong moment because it redefined the Catholic act because this is Italy and it brought not only the March for Life. Which I definitely agree with with Massimo with what the March for Life with a strong change but to understand how it happened I think there is also the battle on the Christian roots. There is the battle that was made around the Law 40 and there is the death of a Catholic that was from the bottom these are the three things but for example everything that happened around what it meant with 2000 with the arrival of the 2000 the meaning of the new millennium because this was the question what kind of society should we have if we are still Catholic or not what has won what has not won.



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12. Interview n°12

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

In Italian, Law 194 has been a very important law in the history of our country, emerging in a period when there were many legislative proposals and advancements concerning rights and protections. Among the greatest protections we have in our country are those established during the years when the national health service was instituted, and when family planning clinics were set up. Therefore, there was a significant surge that clearly found expression within these legislative proposals, including the one on abortion, which is Law 194. It is clear that Law 194 has guaranteed the possibility of abortion in our country, recognizing it as a service that must be provided.

However, even at the time of the approval of Law 194, there was a significant debate surrounding some points of the law itself, which were indeed contested in some cases or discussed in others during parliamentary discussions, and which still today represent a reason for reflection. For example, I think of the issue of conscientious objection, considering that we are still dealing with very high rates of objection in our country. I think about the fact that, even today, it is mandatory to wait 7 days after expressing the desire to terminate a pregnancy in cases that are not deemed urgent. I think about what happens when abortion is sought after 90 days; things become much more complicated for those who need to resort to voluntary termination of pregnancy. And let us remember that termination.

It is not always just a choice but can also be a care, something that is necessary. It is clear that Law 194 has represented a huge step forward in our country, and even the data tells us that abortions in our country are decreasing. This is also clearly reflected in the fact that with the



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recognition of a law, unsafe abortions have also decreased. The problem, however, is that there are still points that have always been a subject of discussion, and whose effects are indeed visible to us.

We can talk about a right to abortion because the same law is very, very, as they say, restrictive. I can talk about a right that is now being enshrined in another law, a right to control women's bodies. So, if we need to introduce the recognition of the right to abortion, then yes, we certainly need to recognize it. Because in any case, the situation is not like in France, which has included the right to self-determination regarding abortion in the constitution, effectively recognizing a right.

However, we are dealing with a law that provides, under certain circumstances, places, occasions, times, etc., that a pregnancy can be interrupted, but the right is not recognized. There should be a recognition of the right to abortion and self-determination within the constitution. This absolutely would be the way to completely enshrine the fact, once and for all, that it is clear that the right to abortion means the right to health, the right to freedom of choice, and the protection of the person. It is clear that it must be recognized. I have presented a bill to include the right to abortion in the constitution because I am convinced that this is a way to define, once and for all, that it is necessary to recognize the right. Thank you 1000.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

So, the pro-life movement, which is also anti-choice in Italy, is a movement that is also, let's say, divided internally on several occasions. I think, for example, about when Mario Adinolfi presented his party, and some movements dissociated themselves from this choice, claiming that they are a movement that operates outside the institutions, from the grassroots. In reality, these movements carry out what they themselves call the contagion of politics, that is, for example, at election times, they ask various candidates to endorse a manifesto proposed by them. The latest one, presented during the European elections, clearly stated at the top that it would not recognize abortion as a right, for example.

Other battles include fighting against gender issues in schools, defending their children, as they say. In reality, we know very well that what they call gender in schools is an education for equal opportunities, an education for respect, an education against discrimination, etc. A sexual-affective education that unfortunately does not yet exist structurally in our country. So, let's say



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there are some cornerstones that keep them united, especially in their struggles. However, internally, the movement has also experienced splits and separations.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

I would focus on this apart from the contagion strategy, for example, which is really well described by Dr. Prearo and I believe that at this stage we find ourselves in a situation where within the government itself or in any case within government offices we recognize representatives linked to the anti-choice world. I am talking about Minister Roccella, for example, and I am talking about the Speaker of the Chamber, Fontana, who, although not part of the government, is clearly connected to Massimo Gandolfini, I am talking about Assuntina Morresi, I am talking about Mantovano.

In short, there is a strong presence both among the ranks of the government and among members of the majority parliamentarians who are not only recognizable within many initiatives concerning the anti-choice world, etc., but have also been proponents of legislative proposals that align with that line. I think, for example, of the recognition of the legal rights of the unborn or the desire to recognize a maternity income for those women who choose not to terminate a pregnancy, as well as those whose rights would be recognized. The cemetery of fetuses burying even those fetuses that against the will of their parents there have been many really so many or those of the day of the unborn the establishment of the day of the unborn. In short between government and majority parliamentary clearly there are many positions many representatives who belong directly to the anti-choice world.

Absolutely I think that the strategies that have changed the most is the fact that while before they directly attacked abortion it was understood at a certain point that it was not a winning strategy on their part because it is clear that after all the statistics speak clearly And anyway after all the right to abortion or the possibility of aborting is something that no one would want to erase if not precisely the pro-life movements and instead of directly attacking therefore the possibility of voluntarily interrupting the pregnancy and therefore erasing for example Law 194.

Do not say and have adopted other strategies have adopted other strategies such as that of inserting themselves even within the broad loopholes of the law in order to as happened to open the doors to anti-abortionists in health centers to then exploit these broad loopholes of the law or in any case the passages in which the law offers them some glimmer to manipulate it.



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And on the other hand there is an entire narrative that would like their presence within health facilities to be necessary to remove what are the socio-economic obstacles or especially the economic ones because they would push a person to choose to voluntarily interrupt a pregnancy but this is absolutely something that goes a narrative that cannot be accepted because if a person has economic problems there are some structural tools some structural measures that the government must adopt regarding housing, precarious work, on a series of initiatives that certainly cannot be resolved with the gift of a package of diapers once in a while, a stroller, powdered milk it is clearly not this that gives the serenity to be able to plan a pregnancy in reality.

The first thing is that surely then the strategy of anti-choice movements but this not only in our country but more globally has clearly undergone an intense function at the moment when, for example, medical technological instruments have been able to provide tools that they have used to carry forward their propaganda I think for example of the images of an ultrasound that clearly presents images that can then be used by their propaganda. Well I think of the images they proposed I think about how many times even the image of a fetus taken outside. I think in particular of the posters that were there that were affixed in our cities where precisely this fetus was depicted inside a belly container but the woman was completely the gestating person was completely removed. From this narrative she no longer existed she was not even depicted what mattered to them was the image of that fetus and only and solely on that fetus all the narrative of that poster focused and what does this tell us it tells us that within these narratives women do not exist gestating people do not exist what they obsessively focus on is the fetus period as if everything else as if the same person who contains that fetus did not exist at all.

- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

Certainly yes at a certain point the whole issue of gender in schools also arrived forcefully this narrative for which there would be movements that would want to manipulate through an education. For example affective sexuality they would want to manipulate the boys I don't know for what reasons but anyway at a certain point there was also this additional struggle that was added to those already fought. I also think for example of all the struggle against trans people and that is for counter paths of gender affirmation with other themes on which this government is dealing with including the minister Roccella who participates in a table for example to discuss the use of triptorelin in cases of reversible suspension in cases of gender dysphoria.



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So, okay. One thing I wanted to mention is that I talked about the suspensive paths of puberty and used the term gender dysphoria because that's what they call it. But in reality, gender dysphoria has been eliminated; this term does not exist. It is called gender incongruence.

- What were the major turning point for pro-life movement in Italy?

The main turning points for the pro-Life movement in Italy have been more than a few occasions, but I would say that this government's actions represent a decisive turning point. It is a decisive moment because clearly, at the moment, there have been manifestations not only of this contamination that we could see through the actions that have been taken and what is being done, but I also think, for example, of the case of the resignation of Deputy Chief of Staff Spano, appointed by Minister of Culture Giuli, immediately after his appointment was revoked. One of the spokespersons for Pro Vita e Famiglia came out saying not only was there satisfaction that the government had reversed its decision—among other things, a decision that Pro Vita e Famiglia had pushed for through a petition that had gathered considerable support—but they did not only welcome the revocation of the appointment favorably; they even used words that, in my view, are very strong, indicating that this should serve as a warning for the government. I believe that it is absolutely intolerable that a government of a democratic and free country be asked to revoke a minister who has every legitimacy to make their appointments. This incident should be a caution for the entire government; it is truly something disturbing. I would ask another question regarding this government's direct approach: with regards to the plural movement, there are representatives who are part of or have been appointed by the government, and Massimo Gandolfini is one of them. It is one of the representatives of this anti-choice world and has been appointed as a government consultant, which includes Minister Eugenia Roccella. In short, they are part of that world, so it is clear that there is a closeness. But I also think of spokesperson Maria Rachele Ruiiu from Pro Vita and Family, who was even a candidate in the last elections on the lists of Fratelli d'Italia. Although she declares that she ran as an independent, well, she was still a candidate on the Fratelli d'Italia lists.



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13. Interview n°13

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

Well, I would say that the word faction is too strong. There are many ProLife associations in Italy, big and small, and there is a lot of confusion, from those who are outside, because they often confuse ProVita, for example, with the life-saving centers.

They are the ones who act on the field and help women who want to try to avoid pregnancy, and they offer them economic help, psychological help, etc. These are the CAVs of the ProLife movement. We, on the other hand, are an association that mainly deals with training and information. Even if we also do, let's say, more closely social activities, because we donate for life, we also give gifts to mothers in need. We opened a house, we rented an apartment near a large hospital here in Rome, which is the Policlinico Gemelli, where there is a department specializing in the assistance of mothers who have a difficult pregnancy. And these people come from all over Italy, to this centre of excellence, and often they have to pay for the hotel, and not everyone can afford it. So we rented this apartment and we make it available for free for these families in need. But our activity, for example, is not to go to doctors or hospitals to dissuade women from having an abortion. We have nothing to do with that.

I wanted to say that the movement is very diverse. I repeat, there are large associations, small associations, and perhaps there are too many of them.

But in Italy we are a bit characteristic because we always try to... Everyone creates their own party, everyone creates their own movement. We are a bit individualistic in this. It would be nice if they were a bit less, a bit bigger, but everyone has their own charisma, as they say. And we get together many times. For example, a great opportunity to get together is when on May



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10 there will be the Manifestazione per l'Unione. There will be more than 100 associations united for the manifestation. So you don't have any communication with the other movements? Yes, we do. On occasions when it happens, we do things together. For example, the Manifestazione per la Vita, that's something we do together. But let's say, in everyday life, it's his activity, it's his mission. So let's say the strategy is the same in Italy but we have territorial circles that is we have more than 100 municipalities in Italy north, centre, south more or less we have local referents so for example those who do it in Rome those who do it in Milan those who do it here.

The campaign is usually concentrated at the national level but it can happen that in a region there is a particular emergency something happens and we have to intervene in a complaint at the local level it depends on our territorial circles. Our main strategy is to inform. Because in our opinion, actually it's not in our opinion, it's a real fact that women, above all, are not informed about what it is and what the consequences are. This is something that has been proven by the numerous calls, e-mails, requests that come from women who have aborted. And I tell you that all of them say something in common. If I had known, I wouldn't have done it. Because women don't know what abortion is, they don't know what the consequences are. Because there is a culture of humanity on this.

So this information Only with true, correct and complete can you make a choice. If you don't know. The choice is true and valid only if there is truth. How can you choose between a pear and an apple if you don't know what the apple ? So I believe that our activity is fundamental not only to protect the right to life of the innocent but also to protect the freedom and health of women. Ok, thank you.

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

So, I say one thing that makes the feminists have straight hair.

I say that this law is the feminist law of the last 50 years because it is a law that completely leaves the woman alone in front of a complicated, difficult and unexpected. There is the complete de-responsibilization of the father because there is a man who is put aside so, with the excuse that abortion is a matter of women, the man is de-responsibilized so it is very easy for the men to use the body as an alternative to abortion but in practise this does not happen. The only ones who try to offer alternative women to abortion are the volunteers of the associations



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that deal with this and they are even massacred saying that they want to prevent this. Maybe you have studied a bit of law. Yes, exactly. So, the law of the state is not necessarily the right law. You think that until a century ago in America there was the law and the Supreme Court believed that blacks were not people. We are talking about the United States which is a country known for its democracy and freedom but until the mid-19th century the human law the law of the state was a very unfair law. We have in almost all the countries including Italy the law 194 that does not consider the child in the womb to be a child. This is highly discriminatory but the most serious thing is that this law has trivialised abortion. It has made abortion as a tooth as an anti-conceptual method among others.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?
- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

So we were born in 2012 so we were young in the 70s and I say that since 2012 we haven't changed the strategies these 14 years but our strategy in my opinion is to start talking about abortion before it was a topic that wasn't even talked about and instead it's important for the reasons. I said before that at least we talk about it. It's a new thing to talk about abortion in Italy because in the 70s. I say that the debate is open in my opinion in 2018 2017-18. We grew up we were born with a small association of 4 people who wanted to have some resources. We rented an advertising space in a palace in Rome and we attached a big manifesto of 8 metres where there was stylised a child at the 10th week of gestation who said I am a human being you are here you have nails you have a heart. This manifesto was immediately censored by the city of Rome and so a lot of controversy in the newspapers in my opinion that was one of the moments when the debate about abortion was not talked about there were pro-life movements that helped women as I said but they were not talked about ok.

- What were the major turning point for pro-life movement in Italy?

I think for example the Family Day or the March for Life yes, yes surely there was the great March for Life of 2012 that was an important moment that gathered we were not yet. We were born right after we still participated in that march as the UGAI Research Foundation because the march was led by a blind man Chen Guangcheng who had run away because he helped women to fight forced abortions there was the policy of the only child and so he was persecuted and it ended up in the newspapers because he took refuge in the American embassy I don't remember in which city and so.

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There was the March for Life that was not organised by us but by many other associations it was dedicated to this Chen Guangcheng so we participated as those who defend the rights of the blind and there we got to know this great reality and these many associations that participated and many young people who believed that they had to deal with this issue of the protection of life from conception and that was an important moment and then honestly great turning points. I can't remember I don't think there were great turning points there was certainly our manifesto. So another important moment was when last year an association called a group of associations the leadership was not us it was not approved the leader of this thing and I'm telling you this because I know but I can't remember so this group of associations presented a proposal of popular law entitled Un cuore che batte to ask not the ban on abortion as it is in America. But to ask if a woman is going to have an abortion to have an ultrasound or hear the heartbeat of the child and this popular law proposal in Italy it works you have to collect signatures if you collect 50,000 signatures this proposal is presented to the parliament. This thing in the pro-life movement also in the church there was not much enthusiasm for this thing yet without media. Without anything this proposal collected more than 100,000 signatures in a very short time this is another important moment because it testifies that people are silent people don't speak about these things but they believe .

I'm very convinced about this the concept of humanity cannot be discussed from an objective and scientific point of view it's human and that's it. I don't know what to say Family Day ok ok Family Day here in Mivanto pro-life was one of the associations that promoted Family Day both the San Giovanni and the Circo Massimo . We were among those were also important moments because hundreds of thousands of people travelled from all over Italy to come to Rome it was a sign that there is a pro-life people that doesn't protest that doesn't speak that is good that believes in certain things and sooner or later you how do you say. After Family Day you have more people interested in your association associations no I think it wasn't Family Day we grew up regardless of Family Day in time I would say naturally it wasn't Family Day a particular moment for our growth we were already big after Family Day we united with another association pro-life united with Generation Famiglia that was born from Guida e Famiglia that became a bigger association being united in two but it wasn't what brought us big consensus they continued before and after.



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14. Interview n°14

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- What do you think was the impact of the 1994 law on abortion and on policies for the family on the work of your centre?

The 1994 law is the Italian law on abortion.

We as CAVs, all CAVs are born with a statute that provides for the application of the 1994 law. In article 2 of the 1994 law, I don't remember what it is, it is written that it is intended to help a woman who is in a difficult economic situation, to activate a series of associations and structures that can concretely help the woman. And among these are the centres for help to life. So let's say that on paper we would like the application of this law, but in practise this application does not exist, because we as centres for help to life or other associations similar to ours, to apply it correctly we would have to be present either in shelters, which were established with this law, or in hospitals. To be able to guarantee help to women without, let's say, a burden on public spending. With solidarity structures that can guarantee concrete help to women who go to hospitals or to the hospital for an abortion.

- Has the Ottavia Life Support Centre collaborated with other pro-life organizations in Italy? If so, in what ways?

The centre for help to life in Ottavia has collaborated with other organisations. I am not from Ottavia.

Yes, but your centre has collaborated with other organisations in Italy. Yes. In what way? We collaborate with all the associations that help motherhood. Ok. So, I personally have had relationships with other associations, which we want to call pro-life, I don't know if they are really pro-life, but they certainly care and help women, pregnant mothers. So, yes, let's say they



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help us especially for medical visits, or also for materials such as gifts of strollers, carriages, these things here, or to make economic projects in favour of mothers.

So, yes, there are various organisations, various associations with which we make networks.

- What strategies has the Centre implemented to support pregnant women and to foster a culture of life?

So, the strategy, there is no strategy, there is listening.

I mean, very often in Italy, but I also think in the country where you come from, I imagine, because Europe is very similar in this, women are not listened to much. They are immediately offered a solution, which is often not what a woman really wants. A woman who is left alone, who is alone to live a pregnancy for various reasons, either because her partner maybe left her, just because he doesn't take care of his son, or because she came to Italy to work, and instead she finds herself pregnant, so she is desperate because she had to come for a reason, and instead she finds herself with an unexpected pregnancy, or because her relatives turned their backs on her.

So, in this situation of complete solitude, let's say that our centre, like all the centres that help the life of Italy, because we all work in the same way, the strategy that can be adopted is that of finally listening to a woman who is experiencing this situation, because today, unfortunately, almost all the women who live an unexpected pregnancy, if they go to a place like a hospital or a consultation centre to be helped, they often find themselves having a single way, a single solution, which is the abortion. And instead, let's say that we propose many solutions, let's say, look, you are free to choose, this must always be said, but if you want, we can help you with an economic project, with concrete support, with listening, with the psychologist, with this and that, with the other, and then, if we can talk about strategy, it is a strategy, but it is something that happens, because it is what we really do, and then a woman starts on her own, this I emphasise, on her own, to carry on the pregnancy, because she sees...(...) Ok, I mean to do the economic project for women and something else. The economic project? Yes, the economic project. Ok, there is a foundation in Italy, called Fondazione Vita Nuova, which gathers all the donations that are made by various people who know this foundation and transforms them into projects to be attributed to each CAB for some, not all, but for those mothers who have particular difficulties, that is, who cannot support themselves in any other way. And so they are various economic projects, however, they help a woman every month, because they are projects that are divided into 18 plus rates, which cover the entire period of pregnancy and even after the child is born. And so these projects, there are about 200 euros a month, but then it also



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depends, but they can completely support a mother, in the sense that they help to face all the expenses necessary, maybe during pregnancy or just the expenses that a family has to face, and so they support her. Then in Italy, however, there are also bonuses to activate, but let's say that those depend, every year they are a little different, you know? And do you have different strategies from the Italian regions? Well, it depends, yes, each region is organised with various bonuses, with internal projects.

What I'm talking about, the economic project of this foundation is private, it is the Italian Movement for Life that manages it. State aid is regional, it depends on the region, or even municipal, so maybe in Rome there are more aid, but this must be reached by social workers, that is, mothers must be linked to social workers and understand together with them what institutional aid there can be.

- Have you noticed any changes in the types of assistance requested or in the challenges faced by women over the past decades?

Look, you find it, above all, with the passport.

Do you understand? Do you understand what I mean by passport? Do you understand what I mean by passport? Yes. So your friends who already know us, we personally with my CAV through the website, now we are looking for more communication on social networks, or through people who know us. So they are not doctors from ...? The doctors, no, it depends, they still know us a little, but those who know us in Rome, some girls send it to us, only that Rome is so big, so we are not able to reach all the doctors, that's it, that's it. Yes. Yes, in this last period in Rome, I only speak of Rome, but the requests for housing have increased, that is, to have a hospitality at the centres of reception, because very often mothers are alone and are in their own housing conditions, either non-existent, so they are almost in the middle of the road, or very precarious, very little dignified to live pregnancy.

Ok. And have you ... faced the ... how do you say ... Have you faced this need? Yes, exactly, and also a shift in the strategies of ... Yes, to face it. Yes.

Yes, we have ... we have put our hands together and we have rented a house, quite large, that can accommodate at least three nuclei, mother and child. This is a house of the centres of aid to the life of Rome, so a house for all mothers, but hosted by the centres of aid to the life of Rome. And this is a small thing, but for us it is a big thing, also because it is totally self-financed, it has no public funding, so it is financed by the generosity of the people who know us, trust us and make us offers.

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- Have you noticed any changes in the types of assistance requested or in the challenges faced by women over the past decades?

Yes. This is a moment of change, the fact of hospitality.

Then in the past, let's say that my centre of aid to the life of Rome, which is not Octavia, but it is called Ariadino, over the years has increased ... Before, maybe only Pannolini, Peron, then it has increased and given small economic contributions, then it has increased and has also given a food bank, then there was a moment when I was a psychologist, then now we are doing the breastfeeding centre, in short, the aid increases every time, practically every two or three years we give more help, more services, because we have realised that these services are fundamental and it is not that they do not exist in Rome, but they are not so, how to say, united, in a single structure, understood? I mean, Rome is so big, so maybe a mother finds herself going from one side to another, instead of us trying to welcome her, also because a relationship of trust is created, ok? So they trust us and everything we offer them, they are happy, they want to follow everything we offer them and therefore we have always increased the aid, also because there are many generous people, volunteers, professionals who help us to support the mothers. I have finished my question.



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15. Interview n°15

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

After the approval of Law 194, attention has gradually shifted from the right to life of the unborn to the sole self-determination of women, creating an artificial and forced opposition between the protection of unborn life and the woman's right to choose whether to continue the pregnancy or terminate it. Furthermore, the law has contributed to a trivialization of abortion, with the risk that it will be perceived as a mere tool for regulating fertility, rather than as an extreme and dramatic decision. In many cases, voluntary termination of pregnancy is considered on par with a contraceptive method, leading to an attitude like: "If I get pregnant, it doesn't matter much, because I can still resort to abortion." At the same time, a culture of abortion has spread, progressively normalizing it until it has become a socially accepted practice devoid of the extreme measure connotation that Law 194 itself, at least in theory, was meant to maintain.

Another critical aspect concerns the lack of promotion of alternatives to abortion. In practice, indeed, women who express the intention to terminate the pregnancy are not adequately informed about alternative options, nor are support pathways encouraged that could allow them to face motherhood with greater peace of mind. Abortion has, in fact, become the bland predominant response, without real support in the choice and without actual recognition of alternative solutions.



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- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

In my opinion, the pro-life movement in Italy is characterized by cohesion and unity in the common commitment to defend life (the unborn children in the womb from abortion and the elderly and sick from assisted suicide and euthanasia). What is certainly evident are the different modes of intervention, which are, after all, the natural reflection of the diversity and multiplicity of the realities that make up the pro-life world in Italy and which contribute, thus, to the richness and effectiveness of the overall action of the movement.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

The pro-life movement in Italy initially sought to counter the legalization of abortion through two abrogative referendums, but did not achieve the desired result. Subsequently, it focused its efforts on providing concrete assistance to women in difficulty, promoting the creation of Help for Life Centers (CAV) to offer real alternatives to abortion.

In the last 10/15 years, the movement has adopted more incisive strategies, with a significant increase in public awareness actions, including petitions, media campaigns, and street protests. For example, organizations like CitizenGO have intensified mobilization activities, seeking to involve an ever-growing number of citizens in defending unborn life.

An important development is the birth last year of the Pro-Life Together Committee, which brings together various pro-life entities to coordinate efforts and strengthen common action. This development marks, we hope, a significant step towards greater cohesion in the movement, improving its effectiveness in promoting a culture of life and opposing legislative drifts concerning abortion.

- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

The "innovative" initiatives of the pro-life movement over the last 10/15 years (namely campaigns, petitions, street protests, etc.) have certainly contributed to greater public awareness, reaffirming the need to counter Law 194 and offering a message of hope to many pro-lifers in Italy; at the same time, they have communicated to politics that the pro-life world exists, is strong, and is ready to fight. At the same time, it is natural that our opponents have also strengthened, fearing a possible attack on the so-called "right to abortion."



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Collaboration among different pro-life entities, through strategic partnerships, has played a fundamental role in enhancing the impact of initiatives. The recently formed Pro-Life Together Committee has the potential to influence the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy, but it is still too early to assess its effectiveness.

16. Interview n°16

(1) Introduction

This interview is part of my thesis research on the evolution of the pro-life movement in Italy from the 1970s to today. The goal is understanding how strategies, narratives, and alliances have evolved. Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

YES.

(2) Questions

- What has been your specific experience in providing abortion-related care?

Yes, exactly. The situation has always been very difficult. So, the Italian law allows abortion in two situations.

In the first 90 days of pregnancy, for the simple will of the woman. After 90 days, if there are serious pathologies that alter the psychological balance of the woman. So, let's say that while for what concerns the abortion of the first 90 days, good or bad, if she was able to organise herself, she was already more integrated into the habit of some hospitals.

That after 90 days was very difficult. So, in the first 90 days it was always complicated, because there was no space dedicated to this intervention. So, often the surgery was done, so often the surgery was put in queue at the other operating rooms, because you had to wait for the surgery.

In the operating room, we could do the interventions of the will of pregnancy. So, it meant waiting all morning, both me and the women. But in the end, it was possible to do it. It was done in the general operating room. The women, perhaps, waited in the department of gynaecology and obstetrics. There was no dedicated space. So, everything was always very variable. You had to wait. There was no space for the women. So, it was very complicated, but it was possible to do it. Instead, for the abortion after 90 days, when it is explained in a different way, it is

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necessary to induce an abortion in the women. So, it is necessary to recover them in the department of obstetrics and gynaecology.

So, perhaps, they were put in the bed next to the women who had given birth and had a son nearby. So, to be able to make the staff understand that it was necessary to look at them, not to put them in the department of obstetrics, but to put them in the department of gynaecology, where, next to the bed, there were women who had surgical interventions, but they did not have a newborn next to them. So, to make it clear, instead, the staff arranged them in the first available bed, without thinking, okay, there is a mother with a newborn nearby, or not.

So, in order to be able to do this, perhaps, in a room, for example, two beds of the gynaecological surgery, it was necessary to free a bed, to move, and this created fatigue for the staff, who did not want to do it. It took years and years to make them understand this sensitivity, because otherwise they would do this change, but very late. Now, I was on duty for 12 hours, so it was important to start the induction of the delivery work immediately, in the morning, I don't know, at 9, because all the induction sometimes lasts 12 hours, and if I didn't get an induction of the delivery work within those 12 hours, starting early in the morning from the pharmacies, the women ended up working at night, when my colleague Obiettore arrived, who was blocking the delivery work.

So, the women, the delivery work was blocked, they spent more time in the hospital, they had to wait for me to come back from duty, because the others didn't do anything, and I didn't live in a hospital, I also had a life, a house, I wasn't in the hospital every day, I was there 38 hours a week, I was there 38 hours a week, that is, three and a half days, it was very... this was very hard, very hard to make sure that when the work was brought in, the women had to be given drugs every three hours, five times, and often the staff refused to give the drugs, that is, to take the drugs from the closet, where the drugs were kept, and put them on the women's bedside table. And I said, but why? What does Obiettore have to do with it? I said, you, as antibiotics, you take them from the closet, you put them on the bedside table, you can do the same for this. And they said, no, because I would normally have to stay and make sure that the women had the drugs in you.

And I said, but you never do this, you put the antibiotics on the bedside table and you go, sometimes the woman is not in bed, she is around, you do not expect the woman to take the antibiotics in you. Yes, but in my mansion it is written that I have to wait, so I don't do it. Why

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was it important? Because when I was on duty for 12 hours, I was not there only for the abortions, I was there for all the emergencies.

So I could end up in the operating room for an emergency, stay there for 3-4 hours, and I had to remind myself to give this drug to the women. And sometimes I could not do it. And so in the end I gave the drugs, all the drugs to be taken to the women, in the morning, I explained to them how, and I did not leave them on the bedside table.

Also on this I was delayed, I was put under request, I did not do it. In short, it took years and years to make them understand, to make them accept that I gave the drug to the women, so that I hoped to get the job done when I was on duty and I could then follow them and not interrupt the work. Another problem, the pain killer.

The anaesthetists, sometimes, they did not want, they had to do let's say types of analgesia, maybe a little important, because a count is the pain of work, but you endure it because you know that you will get a good thing, a birth. A count is having the pain of malformation, having the pain of having made this decision, it is clear that the pain is also felt much more amplified, because you are in a psychological situation of great suffering. So, I asked the anaesthetists to put let's say, they are called antalgic pumps, that is, pumps that are used for pain after a surgery.

So, even there, I had the anaesthetists who said no. And this is illegal from my point of view, because doing an analgesia does not induce pain. But they interpreted the law in a wrong way even now, because the Ministry of Health monitors the objection of the anaesthetists, which, in my opinion, has no reason to exist.

Because if a pregnant woman arrives with appendicitis, we operate it, the anaesthesia increases. After the intervention, after the anaesthesia, the pregnancy continues. So, there have been many difficulties, trying to welcome women, trying to give them a safe place so that they suffer less, trying to make them suffer less physically.

At the time of the expulsion, any obstetrician... Can you hear me? Yes, I can hear you. Ah, perfect. At the time of the expulsion of the foetus, any obstetrician is obliged to assist them, because it is as if a pregnant woman with an abortion that is no longer reversible.

So, the obstetricians are obliged to assist. They didn't do it. I have often found women sitting on the toilet seat to have an abortion, because maybe I was already in the operating room for an emergency, and I had asked the obstetricians to assist her, and the obstetricians didn't assist her.

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So, imagine for a woman who has had a bad diagnosis, who is running and finds out that her gynaecologist is an objector, who has to look for which hospital to have an abortion, and there was not a map of the hospitals before we did it, who has to have an induction hoping that an objector doesn't block this, who has to deal with a painful birth, who is left alone to expel. I mean, there have been many, many obstacles to face, trying to respect the dignity of women and make sure that what was written on the paper was, according to the law, was taken in a respectful way for the woman. It was a war that lasted 40 years, all my work in the hospital.

So, yes, let's say, in the last hospital where I was, with a lot of patience, with infinite patience, in the end, the staff understood. So, when the woman they tried to put her in a room with two beds, next to a person who had had a surgical intervention.

The anaesthetists had given me the recipe for an analgesia and so sometimes I did it, sometimes the anaesthetists began to be available. Then, the obstetricians began to assist the women because a woman who had been expelled, once, here, we put three women together for malformations and they were given courage and they were left to expel on the toilet and they made a complaint. Obviously, when you make a complaint in this field, the hospital says, ok, who is the responsible? The only one who does it.

So, this person It took us a long time to make it clear that the women who had been reported because they were not responsible but the environment that had determined this thing. Finally, thanks to this complaint, the role of the other people and from this moment on, I made the complaint, but from this moment on, the obstetricians were afraid not to assist. In the meantime, I had a primary obstetrician who came from a Catholic who called me and told me you don't have to more than one person at a time who wants to have an abortion after 90 days.

And I told him, you write it to me. I am not an obstetrician so if I get 10, I will take care of You put it in writing and then we'll see. Obviously, he didn't put it in writing but my life in that hospital was not easy because I had the primary against and I had the obstetricians who felt supported by the primary and all the staff so I had continuous and continuous everyday they wrote a letter of request but after this complaint the obstetricians were afraid not to follow a woman and so there was an evolution I left the hospital I retired with a service now that is absolutely human and respectful for women in the end with patience I did it I never objected because I knew that I was the only one in all of Rome we were six to do this kind of abortion in all of Lazio the whole region of Lazio we were only six in Rome I never objected because it



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was extenuating it was extenuating that is if the night if the woman. one of the we were six gynaecologists in Rome Ok, ok, I've stopped reading, and I'm relaxed, ok, ok.

Yes, and would you like to add something? So, when I founded the association, we met with a few people from Rome every now and then, and I thought, I said, we have to create a national network, and everyone said, but who follows it? Because we worked 12 hours a day, we also had a family, we had a private life, there was no time. And so we always asked to create this association. In 2008, in a hospital in Naples, there was a colleague who was having an abortion due to malformations, and he was reported, he went to the police while he was having this abortion, and he was put under investigation by the woman and the doctor.

There, the indignation was so high, so I decided that we had to create this network, because we were used to being reported, a bit like the frog that is put to boil the pot slowly, and you don't realise it, but to see that a woman who is diagnosed with a malformation, who has all this great pain, must also be reported, because she was doing something legal, in the light of the sun, for me it was too much, I was too indignant, it was a lot of pain for me too, and so I decided that we had to create this network. And it was difficult, because only a little more than 50% of the hospitals in Italy offer the intervention service of pregnancy, but I didn't know which one, there was no information from anywhere, so we started as patients do, by calling a hospital, but when you call the hospital's headquarters, they don't give you all the information, they don't even know if there is or isn't a service, so you go to the department of gynaecology, the department of gynaecology doesn't answer you, so you call back, in the end they answer you, maybe a volunteer answers you, or a surgeon says, I don't know, and you call back, to find every colleague, and understand if there was a service in that hospital or not, I needed at least 10 phone calls, because then you found, they told you, yes, it's this person who takes care of this, but when you go to the guard, ah, we can't tell you, so you call back at another time, and someone tells you, yes, it's the guard, Saturday night at 9 p.m., you call him on Saturday night at 9 p.m., and he's done in the operating room for an emergency, so to get in touch with these 1,500 people, it took us a long time, we couldn't do it, I paid with my own pocket, of the students, of the people in pension, who did this job, and in the end we created this network, also because the Ministry of Health told us, ok, use this protocol, it's a pity that in the protocol there were written by the pharmacists that no more products were coming, so we exchanged, luckily, news between us, to say what we can use, and then there were also hospitals where the pharmacist didn't order the drug that wasn't written on the protocol, the pharmacist tells you, so you couldn't do the job, don't sleep.

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- Have you ever encountered pro-life movements or activists in your clinic or hospital?
- If so, how did these encounters manifest, and what impact did they have on your work and on patients?

So, once or twice a year, or every two years, we could organise a scientific congress to get together and pass on new information, and it was very difficult, because even this, organising a congress costs 20,000, 10,000, 20,000 euros, it's very difficult. This time we found, at the entrance of the congresses, posters, and then, let's say, many of us now find these movements in hospitals, because hospitals make contracts in which these people can stay for free, or hospitals make contracts in which these movements can bury these faiths. So, let's say that we have more and more problems, personally, besides these things in front of the congresses, or difficulties when journalists call me to have a direct service with eye doctors, but that's fine, to hear your opinions, why not? I found movements in front of the hospital but they were singing, they were playing, but there were some places where they prevented women from entering.

So, we also got in touch with many journalists over the years, and we tried to make these situations public, to make them public, but let's say that this movement for life is taking more and more steps, because now the politicians who govern and who have put their men also in the hospital structure, or as primaries in the hospitals, are increasing. So, let's say, we have more and more of these movements in front of the consultants, in front of the hospitals, and often they don't stay in their place, in the sense that they should have a room and the women, if they want, should go to them. These movements intercept in a very disloyal way, without qualifying themselves. Women say, you have to come and do a lecture. Women think that another lecture, to be able to do the interruption of pregnancy, instead they take them to this room where they show them images, things that are not real. The woman obviously does not change her mind.

She goes to do the interruption of pregnancy in a much more serious psychological state. Yes. And I find it extremely incorrect, that is, they deceive women just to make them feel more guilty, because women do not change their mind.

So we have this difficulty that we, the operators, we receive women who are in a very tested psychological state and therefore it is even more difficult to manage situations, because we also have a more aggravated psychological part. So if we go to protest from our managers, they do not care about anything. So every now and then, thanks to the help of journalists, we manage to do something.



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- How has Italy's abortion, Law 194, shaped the current state of reproductive rights in the country?

I find that the 1994 law is fantastic. The only fact is that there is no one who watches that it is applied. Great. And I can speak about the law because the 1994 law speaks of a great interruption, but it did not speak of the right to an abortion. Yes, yes. The question is that the 1994 law speaks of a pregnancy to abort, but it does not speak of the right to an abortion, where to obtain the law or what to do to ensure the right to an abortion for women. So the 1994 law has an article, I think it is article 7, where it says that hospitals must offer both types of pregnancy interruption, the first 90 days and the second 90 days. It does not say 50% of hospitals. It says hospitals.

So currently we have, I think, 59% of hospitals that offer pregnancy interruption. It would be enough if article 7 was applied. All hospitals must offer interruption for the first 90 days and the second 90 days. Period. It would be enough to apply it. But no one checks and all hospitals do this service. There is no control body. This is the problem. Because if all hospitals provided this possibility to women, it would be another story. Because they would find a place everywhere. Instead, there are few hospitals and, as a consequence, sometimes women do not find a place immediately, or they have to move. Among other things, there was not, before we created it, a map of hospitals.

So, looking all over Italy to create the network, we understood which were the hospitals. We made a map and we put it on our website. Then we tried to give information about how to enter the service of each hospital. Because each hospital has a different way, depending on the possibilities that the organisation has. So, it is already something. Of course, if the woman could go to any hospital, it would be easier. Then, the woman, as a first thing, must have a certificate that attests that she wants to interrupt pregnancy. Then, even on this, the doctors made an objection. Illegal. But it is illegal because writing a certificate that says that the woman came to me because she wants to interrupt, and I tell her to wait seven days, does not mean provoking an abortion. Because the woman can also reject it. Yet this is the case.

Now, the woman is alone to face the difficulties. So, another thing that we have done, together with other associations, is a small booklet called IWG without MA, Zero Obstacles, in which we have collected all the problems that women told us, by calling us, and we have tried to solve them with lawyers, giving women some possibilities. Of course, if the woman is alone and someone says, I have a certificate, I will not do it, what does this woman do? She looks for another place. She looks for a fast solution. And, however, the fast solution, first, she goes to her gynaecologist and discovers that she has blisters. She does not say it. She says she does not



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want to go to the hospital, because this is also interesting. Obstacles are then ashamed to live. Yes. It is very interesting, isn't it? So, the woman should go to a consultancy, where there are guarantees, but even there, consultancies are decreasing, they are continuously closed. There is a will to close them, because they are consultants focused on the will of the woman, while the State is giving a lot of money to the Movement for Life, I am talking about 10 million euros per month, and they open their private consultants, they put their men, but they are money from the government, that is, they are money made with our taxes, of Italian citizens who voted through the referendum and have manifested the will to have this law. The Benito gave 10 million, 9.6 million, Piedmont so far has given 2 million to the Movement for Life.

Yes, yes, I saw. So, let's say that, because the law exists, but it is not the will to apply it, and it has never been. And the various political governments have never been concerned about this. The left is not so concerned. The right, let's imagine, is working against it. Unfortunately, the right is gaining more and more power all over the world. We know that there is this movement called Agenda Europa, which is against contraception, abortion, divorce and homosexuality. And this is placing its men in political positions all over the world.

Yes, exactly. Surely, since there was the law, there has been a decline in what was the perception of spontaneous abortions. That is, obviously before the law, many women arrived with abortions in action, and they were classified as spontaneous abortions. Yes. They were not. After the law, there has been a drastic decline in spontaneous abortions, because pregnancy tests have started. This means that the percentage of clandestine abortions has certainly decreased. A lot. So, in the meantime, women have been able to have abortions safely, and in hospitals.

It has been possible to talk about abortion, and so there has certainly been a great improvement. There has not been a complete application of the law, so we find ourselves with these difficulties. What worries us is the political situation.

I don't understand why these people deal with or talk about life, but they never go to the arms factories, they never go to help hundreds and hundreds of women and children, men and children who die in the Mediterranean. There is also a manipulation of the term life, which is used to influence less cultivated, more fragile minds. Thank you very much.

- How central is conscientious objection in the pro-life strategy in Italy?

Unfortunately, the objection of the Consensus has been allowed, but it is very high. Even there, we are around 60 and below. More than half of the gynaecologists are objectors, but no one is for an ethical reason, because having always worked in the hospital, I always received calls from my colleagues, who had a sister, a cousin, a wife, who wanted to have an abortion. So it

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is certainly not an ethical question. In the hospital, you don't earn money. Because the woman who has an abortion does not come to you in private, because you are a memory of something that she does not want to remember.

Doing this job does not increase your private activity. If you spend more time in the operating room, everyone knows you as the surgeon who works the most, so maybe he is better. So they look for you. If you spend more time in the operating room, everyone knows you as the surgeon who works the most, so maybe he is better. So doing this job does not bring you anything, it's just a lot of problems. There is this possibility of objecting, and this is a problem, because as in the Campania region, 80% are objectors, the hospitals that offer this service are few, the waiting lists are many. So even if the woman has time to have an abortion, no one finds a place and calls us. So thanks to the network we have created, because it is a strange network, it is a strange network of gynaecologists who help each other, and who help women. So the women call us from Naples, I still have two weeks to stop the pregnancy, but there is no place.

So we call on the network, and we say, who has a place? And the first one who has a place says, okay, come to me in Rome, in Calabria, wherever you want, but we don't find a place. It's a strange association. And after, is it better? Well, we find the possibility of abortion, but the problem always remains in the countryside. 80% are objectors.

- Would you say the pro-life movement in Italy is homogeneous or divided into different factions?

I don't know, honestly. I know there are many names, Milizia Cristi, Soldiers of Christ, Movimento per la Famiglia, they have a few different names, but I don't know much about them.

I see that they open offices in the city, which means paying rent, but it seems to me that there is almost no one inside. Let's say there are people who are paid, this yes, except us. I hear you again.

Sorry, me too. Let's say that this money, these 10 million euros, could be invested in creating more asylum, in creating jobs for young people, right? Yes. Instead, the government gives money to Movimento per la Vita, it took them out and gave them.

- What enduring strategies has the Italian pro-life movement employed over the decades?

Before, you didn't have a relationship, a fusion with Movimento per la Vita, and today I think that the relationship between the movement and the new government is like this. Have you seen this? Yes, after the last Congress of the National Network of Families, as it is called. Famili



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Day. Exactly, in Verona, that's when it all started. From that moment, I think that even in Milan, there were a lot of people who took more power. So, that's when the connection with our politicians Yes. Certainly, they invest a lot of money in communication, and they have a lot of money. Meanwhile, they have put up manifestos all over Italy, and this means having a lot of money, asking for permission, paying the rent of the places, with advertisements that are very well thought out. For example, for March 8th, I remember one, let's make them vote, but let's make them be born to vote. Or, for the pharmacological abortion, I remember the advertisement of a woman, as if she were dead white as snow, with a poisoned apple in front of her.

And so, as if to say, watch out for this drug. So, with very well thought-out advertisements, to immediately reach the psychology, the emotions of the woman, but which are absolutely, scientifically wrong. Yes. Not correct. Not only that, but scientific literature is also beginning to emerge, of little value, but it is emerging. Scientifically, they publish things in which they begin to say that these drugs are harmful.

And so, there is also another way, that is, they are beginning to make incorrect scientific publications. Advertisements with incorrect information to make people feel guilty. I remember one, a manifesto that was high, I don't know, ten floors high, where there was a foetus, obviously not corresponding, and here they said, my heart is beating. I mean, I think there are many other problems. There are people who don't have a job. Yes, yes.

People who have precarious jobs. There are people who don't have a home, who don't have a job. I think there is money to invest in something else at this moment, and not in this.

Yes, exactly. This term, manipulated life. Because, as the Valdians rightly say, life doesn't just mean, so to speak, giving birth to it, but then, you give it a home, you give it a family that wants it, you give it a society that gives it the opportunity to go to school, to grow up in a serene environment. Do we want to give birth to it, just to have a number, or do we also want to ensure a biography? No? So, I found the Valdians much more interesting than the Catholics. Thank you very much, because it's very interesting

- How have these strategies shaped the evolution of the pro-life movement?

Exactly. So it's very strange that they deal so much with this topic. Evolution. So, for example, since the 1970s, today... So, certainly, what I see is that there is... they want to remove the consultants, which are the places where the woman is the one who decides things. Yes. While these Catholic private consultants, where it is not very clear that they are Catholic private consultants, some women end up inside, because they make mistakes, because hypocritically, they don't define themselves outside.



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Yes, exactly. Then, this publicity has increased, and the fact has increased that the politicians are riding this... this strategy to influence the minds. Of course, I always repeat, from the Congress of Verona on, I notice this, I notice what I see in the world worries me a lot, what I see in America, what I see in Europe. I mean, it's certainly something for... I don't think that politicians care so much about life. Their lives, in private, you can see that they do what they want, they don't care about marriage. We have politicians who have children without being married.

I believe that this is a geopolitical movement that rides these... these ideas to obtain easier consensus from the minds. This is my opinion. Then, that there are behind this movement a few unbalanced minds that want to impose their ideas on other people, but not necessarily because they worry about life, because, as I said, if there was really a concern for life, they would go to arms factories, they would go to recover people who are in danger of life in the Mediterranean, who are already alive. So, I don't know, surely behind it is either a geopolitical movement that wants to obtain easier consensus from the minds already prepared by religion, or behind this movement there are people with an unbalanced mind that wants to impose their ideas on a population that has already expressed its will. I don't know well. No, no, it's a good answer.

- What were the major turning point for pro-life movement in Italy?

Repeat, in my opinion, it was when there was the Congress in Verona. Ok.

It was very decisive. From that moment their policy developed. And have you seen, for example, the referendum in the year 80, no, if it was 80, the referendum, and then with Berlusconi too, first he was pro-choice and then pro-life, and this, all this built the summum and then the family day was the shift.

I don't know because before I knew about the existence of this movement but because we made two appeals to the European Court of Social Rights and there we came to know about this movement in Europe, working with Europe. But it seemed to us almost science fiction at the time, science fiction politics. Personally I understood that it was true from that moment in Verona. Before maybe there was something but I didn't realise it.