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RESEARCH ARTICLE

VISUAL ANALYSIS AND RIGHT WING (POPULIST) GROUPS

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ABSTRACT: The following article main contribution falls within the domain of methodology as it draws attention on the strength of visual analysis within the field of study of populism. The work elaborates on a visual analysis of the posters published to advertise two events – a concert in memory of Jan Palach and the World Congress of Families – organized in Verona in the early months of 2019 by a set of organizations linked to the right and the extreme right and to conservative catholic stances. These politicized organizations carry out a specific type of cultural-political work and operate at the edge of the political sphere, by building alliances with (extreme) right-wing political actors and by lobbying political institutions. The visual analysis is geared at bringing agencies and ambivalences to the fore and allows to uncover (a) the ‘communicative camouflage’ of these organizations who spread radical right and catholic conservative messages, traditionally marked by highly recognizable communication features and symbols, in more neutral, moderate and positive forms; (b) the deployment of some populist elements in their communication strategy, such as the reference to welfare chauvinism, to the first Conte government as well as the identification of the ‘natural family’ as an homogenizing category associated with the good and moral side of society. While these features are per se not sufficient to define these organizations as fully populist actors, they are nonetheless important to underscore the role played by these organizations in spreading extremely polarized messages in a more digestible way for broader audiences by means of a communicative camouflage and of populist elements in their communication strategy.

KEYWORDS: Visual analysis, visual semiotics, communicative camouflage, catholic fundamentalism, populist radical right

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1. Introduction

This article main contribution falls within the domain of methodology as it draws attention on the strength of visual analysis within the field of study of populism. As Stocchetti and Kukkonen point out “visual communication is powerful because it binds the viewer in a communicative relation where agency is hidden and meaning ambivalent” (2011, 4), thus the task of visual analysis is not merely descriptive, but rather is geared at bringing agencies and ambivalences to the fore. Populist agency has been mostly attached to charismatic leaders (Kitschelt 2000) and populist parties both on the left and on the right side of the political spectrum (Caiani and della Porta 2011; Caiani and Graziano 2019; Mudde 2007; Muis and Immerzeel 2017; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014). More recently, scholars conceiving of populism as a communication strategy have pointed to the role of media as populist actors for themselves, rather than as sheer reporters of populist messages from politicians (De Vreese, C. H., Esser, F., Aalberg, T., Reinemann, C., Stanyer, J. 2018; Chatterje-Doody and Crilley 2019; Reinemann, C., Stanyer, J., Aalber, T., Esser, F., De Vreese, C. H. (eds.) 2019). Within the scope of this analysis, the main actors are not political in the strictest institutional sense: they are politicized organizations operating at the edge of the political sphere, building alliances with (extreme) right political actors and lobbying political institutions, and which carry out specific type of cultural-political work. The aim of this analysis is not to parallel such organizations to fully populist actors, but rather to emphasize the ways in which they deploy some populist elements in their communication strategy as well as to underscore the role they play in spreading extreme right and fundamentalist catholic stances through a communicative camouflage, a strategy that aims at expressing extremely polarized contents through a pretended moderation – provided via a mild, non-divisive and progressive-like communication style – which is very clearly noticeable when focusing on the visual aspects of communication.

Notwithstanding theoretical disputes over the definition of populism, when it comes to the operationalization phase most analyses rely on the study of textual communication and discourses produced by populist leaders or on party manifestos (Kriesi 2018). With due exceptions (among which Wodak and Forchtner 2014; Richardson and Colombo 2013; Schmuck and Matthes 2017), studies that combine the analysis of visual communication and populism remain limited in number. This work elaborate a visual analysis of the posters published in occasion of two events held in Verona in the early months of 2019 by a set of organizations linked to the right and the extreme right political sphere and to fundamentalist religious stances. The first is *Nomos – Terra e Identità*

(Nomos – Land and Identity), a local cultural association closely related to the institutional and non-institutional extreme right which organized a concert in which neo-fascist bands played in memory of Jan Palash. The second case concerns a set of organizations, headed by the International Organization for the Family (IOF), which organized the World Congress of Families (WCF), coupling fundamentalist catholic and (extreme) right political stances. The analysis of the posters draws attention to the potential of visual analysis in providing important insights on the ways in which the message is constructed and conveyed, uncovering the communication strategy of these actors. In particular, the analysis shows how these organizations (1) deploy some populist elements in their communication strategy, for instance they make reference to welfare chauvinism (Muis and Immerzeel 2017), to the 5 Star Movement-Northern League populist 'government of change' (Governo del cambiamento) and make use of the term family to identify a homogenizing category associated with the good, moral and integer side of society (Meret and Siim 2013); (2) they put in place a communicative camouflage aimed at spreading radical right and catholic conservative messages in a neutral and positive way, while leaving behind the highly recognizable symbols that traditionally marked their communication style. This communicative camouflage can be partly related to the concept of 'calculated ambivalence' (Wodak and Forchtner 2014; see also Engel and Wodak 2012) developed in the study of the right-wing populist discourses via a visual analyses of the comics 'Embattled Vienna 1683/2010' published by the Austrian Freedom Party. Calculated ambivalence emphasizes the strategic attempt to convey divergent meanings through an ambivalent use of visual communication, which carries two or more contradictory meanings at the same time, thus addressing different audiences and evading responsibility for the messages expressed. While calculated ambivalence points at the attempt to mix up fiction-like elements with hate-speech from the part of right-wing populists, the concept of 'communicative camouflage' rather emphasizes the attempt made by these organizations to use visuals as moderating containers of extreme right and fundamentalist messages. As in the case of calculated ambivalence, the visual strategy aims at broadening the set of audiences addressed. However, the communicative camouflage suggest a further step in the attempt of these organizations to bring extremely polarized political stances to a mainstream diffusion, not by moderating the content of their messages, but rather by watering down their communication style and leaving behind highly recognizable and divisive symbols.

2. Case selection

The posters selected within the scope of this work share a set of relevant features that oriented the choice. Primarily, *Verona is characterized by a long-term extreme right tradition, within both institutional settings and sub-cultural ones, to the point that it has been referred to as a laboratory of the radical right (Franzina ed. 2009). Furthermore, Verona is marked by a deeply rooted Catholic conservative tradition. Indeed, it is not by chance that several anti-abortion, anti-feminist, and anti-LGBTQ+ political initiatives are conceived and experimented in the city, before being spread to other cities at the national level and beyond.* These two tendencies have altogether forged a religious fundamentalist right (Minkenberg 2017) that has found a fertile ground in the city; *in these respect, then, the specificity of Verona can be looked at as a useful case for theory-building on extreme right and populism.* Secondly, both events were carried out in the early months of 2019, in a moment of open political opportunities (Tarrow 1996) for the extreme right at the local level, where it has found a fertile ground and an institutional support at least since 2007 with the election of Flavio Tosi as the city major, and at the national level, during the fifteen months of the first Conte government, sustained by a coalition of the 5 Stars Movement and the Northern League. Thirdly, compared to other events carried out in the same time span in Verona, the selected events brought forth a vibrant public dispute reported on national media¹ and a strong response from the part of the local

¹ Berizzi, P., "Provocazione sovranista a Verona: un concerto nazirock per Jan Palach", La Repubblica, 29/12/2018

https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2019/03/12/news/patrocinio_palazzo_chigi_presidenza_consiglio_ministro_famiglia_world_congress_of_families_di_verona_revoca-221384632/?ref=search

Berizzi, P., "Verona, concerto estrema destra per Jan Palach: teatro non concede più spazi", La Repubblica, 15/01/2019

https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/01/15/news/concerto_ultradestra_verona_jan_palach_no_teatro-216642392/

Stella, G. A., "Gli studenti cechi indignati: 'No a quel concerto per Jan Palach'", Il Corriere della Sera, 06/01/2019

https://www.corriere.it/opinioni/19_gennaio_06/gli-studenti-cechi-indignati-no-quel-concerto-jan-palach-db131466-11ea-11e9-9792-87746038bd2f.shtml

Custodero, A., "Congresso Famiglia, Di Maio: 'A Verona destra di sfigati.' Giallo sul patrocinio del governo." La Repubblica, 12/03/2019

https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2019/03/12/news/patrocinio_palazzo_chigi_presidenza_consiglio_ministro_famiglia_world_congress_of_families_di_verona_revoca-221384632/?ref=search

Arachi, A., "Congresso delle famiglie, ospiti oltranzisti di tutto il mondo: chi sarà al meeting di Verona." Il Corriere della Sera, 14/03/2019

https://www.corriere.it/politica/19_marzo_14/famiglia-congresso-verona-matteo-salvini-annuncia-io-andro-845d07b8-4646-11e9-a4ff-e29a115180ab.shtml

movement area, for the case of the concert in memory of Jan Palash, and from the trans-feminist movement *Non Una Di Meno* and other LGBTQ+ organizations, for the World Congress of Families. The type of responses coming from the left-wing movement have spanned from denouncement on social media, which contributed to the national diffusion of the news, to massive public protest, as in the case of the rally organized by *Non Una di Meno* movement to publicly protest against the World Congress of Families. These actions have been complemented by a visual repartee, that quoted the posters analyzed here to denounce and mock the events in question and to advertise the counter-demonstration. Finally, while the purpose of this work is to provide a few instances of the potential of visual analysis within the field of study of populism, it remains limited in scope and by no means aspire at providing a comprehensive study of the matters treated in this research note.

3. Methodology

From a methodological perspective, I follow the visual semiotics approach as proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), who respectively drew on the work of Michel Halliday (1978) and on Critical Linguistics. Visual semiotics conceives of visuals as a set of signs whose meaning ought to be uncovered. Signs are analyzed in relation to the processes of sign-making and to the role of sign-makers in such process. In this regard, the process of representation is conceived as based on a specific interest of the sign-maker, who selects a criterial aspect of the object represented, which is sorted depending on the motivations that stand behind the representation itself.

Visual semiotics offers a set of valuable tools to carry out the analysis of the posters within the scope of this work. The main advantage of this approach relates to its conception of the visuals analyzed as a comprehensive text including both visual and linguistic sections, which are regarded to as 'meaningful wholes' (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 1). In particular, Kress and Van Leeuwen stress the importance of meanings that can be drawn from the composition of the visuals under scrutiny. Consistently, the authors maintain that a sort of syntax of the visuals can be detected or, in other words, that a set of regularities or patterns – typical of Western produced materials – can be singled out and ascribed with a specific meaning. However, this comprehensive analysis of the visual does not imply that the same analytical tools are used for both linguistic and visual

sections; on the contrary, linguistics is treated as one branch of semiotics which is therefore equipped with a set of distinct tools for the analysis of linguistic parts, proving especially useful when it comes to the analysis of multi-modal posters. Finally, as several other approaches to visual analysis emphasize (Müller and Özcan 2007; Stocchetti and Kukkonen 2011; Doerr and Milman 2014), visual semiotics as well highlights the importance of the context in which visuals are produced, spread and the type of response they generate (2006: 8).

Following this approach, the analysis develops according to three steps described below. Prior to the visual analysis itself, a contextual frame of the two events is outlined through the analysis of a set of relevant documents and newspaper articles². Subsequently, the first stage of the visual analysis is carried out: I examine the main visual and linguistic elements in isolation from the composition scheme, in particular logos and linguistic sections are analyzed separately in this phase. The second stage of the visual analysis is concerned with the ways in which different linguistic and visual elements relate to one another within an integrated text, in this regard the compositional patterns and their purport are taken into consideration. To conclude, I briefly discuss the movement response to these events, in terms of the visual repartee that the two posters triggered.

4. The neo-fascist concert in memory of Jan Palash

Nomos – Terra e Identità (Nomos – Land and Identity), a cultural association set in Verona, organized a concert in memory of Jan Palash³ in January 2019, in occasion of the 50th anniversary from his death. *Nomos* holds close political ties with some extreme right groups and with some local extreme right administrators, who directly contributed to its creation as a cultural association to collect money for the people of Verona affected by the flood of 1st September 2018. In fact, the event was organized with the patronage of both the Province and the Municipality of Verona, and received public support from the part of Forza Nuova and Casapound, two Italian extreme right political organizations⁴.

² The documents selected and analysed for the contextual frame are: a set of national and local newspaper articles reporting on the events; press releases published by the events organizers on facebook and on their webpages; posts and press releases related to the event published on the facebook page of the local movement area (Veronesi Aperti al Mondo), on Non Una di Meno movement's facebook page, on Casapound Verona and on Forza Nuova and Fortezza Europa facebook page.

³ A Czechoslovak student who set himself to fire in the aftermath of the Prague Spring in 1969.

⁴ Forza Nuova expressed its support via their national and provincial leaders, Luca Castellini and Pietro Amedeo:

The concert hosted several bands sharing a neo-fascist background. Among them, *La Compagnia dell'Anello* (the Fellowship of the Ring) is one of the first self-proclaimed 'alternarive right' Italian rock bands which was constituted during the first Hobbit Camp in 1977⁵. *The Hobbit*, another band involved, is led by Emanuele Tesauro, who is the current leader of Fortezza Europa (Fortress Europe), a political group which recently split from Forza Nuova.

*The planning of a concert in memory of Jan Palash initially gained visibility thanks to local left-wing movement area who successfully mobilized to denounce and contrast the concert, which was relocated twice and was eventually held in a peripheral area of Verona's province. The event was reported on the national press and beyond: the Students' Council of the Faculty of Art at Charles University in Prague – which used to be Jan Palash's department – as well as some European Members of Parliament outspoke against the appropriation of the memory of Jan Palash put in place by the extreme right.*⁶

(Figures 1 and 2 about here)

The cultural association name '*Nomos. Terra e Identità*', makes reference to traditions – *Nomos*: customs and habits from the ancient Greek – linked to the territory and to identity. The logo (Fig. 1) takes the shape of a coat of arms; the symbol of the *Scala*, from the local middle age lords of the city, is depicted in central position. An open book is placed on the stairs symbol, on which the words land and identity are written. The choice of the yellow and blue colors and the symbol of the *Scala* both make reference to the city football team and to traditional symbols that have come to designate the local radical right.

The graphic font of the title highlights the three main words '*Terra e Libertà*' (land and freedom) and 'Verona', somewhat suggesting that the local city should be territorially freed from a not better specified occupier. A clear reference is made to strong local identity values and to a rhetoric of liberation which, in turn, evokes the presence of an

"Il concerto per Jan Palach non si farà neanche al Movieland Park", Verona Sera, 18/01/2019

<http://www.veronasera.it/attualita/concerto-jan-palach-movieland-park-no-18-gennaio-2019.html>

Casa Pound Verona, on its facebook page Il Mastino, published a post on 18/01/2019 in memory of Jan Palash, attacking the "bagarre of these days" according to them provoked by the anti-fascist left.

⁵ Three hobbit camps were organized by the young section of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* between 1977-1980 (see di Nunzio, D., Toscano, E., 2014: 251-262).

⁶ Stella, G. A., "Gli studenti cechi indignati: 'No a quel concerto per Jan Palach'", Il Corriere della Sera, 06/01/2019

https://www.corriere.it/opinioni/19_gennaio_06/gli-studenti-cechi-indignati-no-quel-concerto-jan-palach-db131466-11ea-11e9-9792-87746038bd2f.shtml

"Concerto nazirock per Jan Palach, anche i cechi chiedono spiegazioni", Verona Sera, 31/12/2018

<http://www.veronasera.it/politica/concerto-nazi-rock-jan-palach-verona-repubblica-ceca-31-dicembre-2018.html>

external enemy. Furthermore, the title of the event is an example of left-wing symbols' appropriation. Land and freedom quotes the famous motto '*Tierra y Libertad!*' of the *guerrilleros zapatistas*, which has been largely resumed by various left-wing anarchist experiences and, among others, directly reported in the title of 1995 Ken Loach movie, set during the Spanish civil war.

In the bottom right part of the poster, the good cause of the event is reported: "Eventual profits will be donated to the families of Verona affected by the flood on 1st September 2018." In this respect, two elements should be highlighted: the first refers to the category of family, which marks the social unit appointed as a worthy target of help. The term family is far from randomly selected; in fact, it stands at the core of the extreme right's political agendas: the term is framed as a political keyword whose meaning refers to conservative, catholic values as opposed to progressive civil rights, advanced by LGBTQ+ and feminist movements. The use of the term is even the least neutral in Verona, as it clearly resonates with local political specificity: the at-the-time Minister of family Lorenzo Fontana – a long-term member of pro-life associations – comes from Verona where he was vice-major, the first pro-life motion against 194 Italian law on voluntary termination of pregnancy has been approved in Verona in October 2018, and finally, the World Congress of Families was held in Verona at the end of March 2019, bringing together several extreme right, right-wing politicians and pro-life associations from all over the world. The second element reported refers to one of the political objectives attached to this cultural event which aims at supporting local families affected by the flood through a 'welfare-oriented' donation. Welfare chauvinism has been defined as one of the key features of Radical Right Populism (Muis and Immerzeel, 2017). Indeed, the donation to those 'affected by the flood' refers, on the one hand, to specific social practices targeting exclusively local people, used to reinforce the boundaries of native communities. On the other hand, it aims to mobilize specific emotions, such as the resentment of the deprived and a negative perception of the state institutions and bureaucracy as unwilling or incapable to provide assistance to native people.

The poster overall communicative effect does not evoke a rock concert. Rather, the choice of a brown-gray tinge, the main image and the whole composition recall more of a formal event. The message is conveyed in a mild and neutral way, this is especially visible when comparing this poster to other nazi-rock concerts' visual communication⁷.

⁷ See for instance the poster of the concert 'Defend Europe' held in Verona on April 20, 2019 organized by the Veneto Fronte Skinheads
"Cerea (Verona), concerto di gruppi nazi-rock in un padiglione del comune. Ed è polemica." *La Repubblica*, 21/04/2019

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) distinguish between narrative and conceptual patterns of visuals. In the former type of visual, participants are represented while in action and are therefore referred to as actors. In the latter type of visual, which corresponds to the case of this poster, the subject depicted is not performing any action and is described according to a “generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence” (2006, 59). Thus viewers do not identify the figure as an actor, but rather as a carrier of significant possessive attributes, like a hero or a saint. In the poster, this impression is enhanced by the neutral background, by the fact that the picture of Jan Palash is posed and occupies a relevant portion on the left side of the poster, and by the feathered edges of the picture which contribute to give the impression of being in presence of a major figure.

The poster analyzed has prompted a visual repartee with the local movement area, which republished the same poster with the addition of a yellow banner in central position stating ‘Nazi-rock concert’.⁸ This response strategy had the purpose of denouncing by mocking the event and of countering the communicative camouflage that was being put in place, by clearly bringing out what the event was about.

To sum, three main elements emerge from this analysis, the first refers to the appropriation of left-wing cultural symbols which are re-signified and deployed to express extreme right stances. The second relates to the way in which visual communication is designed so as to convey a message that is made to look harmless and moderate. Finally, the third refers to the use of some populist elements in the communication strategy of this organization, such as the mention to welfare chauvinistic practices and the use of the word ‘family’ to frame an easily identifiable group that can be swiftly extended to mean the good ‘people’.

5. The XIII World Congress of Families

The World Congress of Families⁹ (WCF) is organized annually by the International Organization for the Family (IOF), a US based cultural organization lobbying to uphold a

https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/04/21/news/verona_veneto_fronte_skinheads_concerto-224593624/

⁸ The poster modified by the local movement area is published on ‘Veronesi aperti al mondo’ facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Assemblea17dicembre/photos/a.397940793872118/776962725969921/?type=3&theater>

⁹ Declared objective of the Congress is “to unite and let cooperate leaders, organizations and families to affirm, celebrate and defend the natural family as the only stable and fundamental unit of society.” <https://wcfverona.org/it/about-the-congress/>

heteronormative model of family. At the end of March 2019, its 13th version was held in Verona in collaboration with other international and Italian pro-life and pro-family organizations¹⁰, most of which share a common support for conservative catholic positions and right to extreme right political stances, often publicly endorsed. The cultural and political activities of these groups range from the support to gender binarism and the so-called 'natural' family, to the opposition to LGBTQ+ and women's rights.

This blend of right and extreme right political stances with catholic fundamentalism has found a fertile ground in Verona, where conservative religious powers and right-wing politicians have fostered a long-term alliance (Franzina ed. 2009). In fact, the Congress has counted on the public endorsement of the local bishop as well as the patronage from Verona Municipality (which offered also financial support), Verona Province, Veneto and Friuli Venezia-Giulia Regions, and the former Ministry for Family and Disabilities. Several right-wing and extreme right politicians participated, among them the leader of the Northern League and former Italian Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini, the leader of Brothers of Italy Giorgia Meloni, the Hungarian Minister for Family, Youth and International Affairs Katalin Novak, and the at-the-time President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani. The Congress has been the source of considerable controversy: opposition to it has arisen especially from the area of left-wing social movements, especially the trans-feminist global movement *Non Una Di Meno* and many other LGBTQ+ organizations who gathered in Verona to protest against the Congress conservative and illiberal positions. For what concerns institutional politics, the Democratic Party and the 5 Stars Movement took a stand against the Congress.

(Figures 3 and 4 about here)

The logo of the XIII World Congress of Families (Fig. 3) depicts eight stylized arches which recall those of the Arena, the historical symbol of the city. Two arches are filled with two stylized persons: a light blue figure in bottom left position, symbolizing a man, and dark pink colored figure in top right position, symbolizing a woman. The two figures are carved with a half heart which becomes complete only when the two are juxtaposed¹¹, suggesting that the only possible love is the heterosexual one, while all other arches are empty and colored in gray, suggesting that there is no alternative to the type of love depicted. This message is further remarked by the choice of blue and pink colors, in line with other pro-life association symbols, which reinforce the idea that only gender binarism, heterosexual love, and families formed by heterosexual couples are legitimate. This design recalls yet another symbol of the so called 'city of love', the Juliet balcony, as

¹⁰ Provita Onlus Association, National Organization for Marriage, Generazione famiglia, Comitato difendiamo i nostri figli, CitizenGO.

¹¹ As in the video version and in other versions of the logo itself.

suggested by the general position of the stylized figures, and the position of the head of the blue Romeo which seems to be staring up to pink Juliet.

In the bottom part of the poster (Fig.4), a white and separate framework contains the institutions of patronage and the organizing associations. On the left side, surrounded by a double frame (one open and rectangular and one more faded and curved) the title of the congress can be read: "Il vento del cambiamento" (the wind of change), which resonates with the 5 Stars Movement-Northern League populist government, the self-proclaimed *governo del cambiamento* (government of change). The choice of the title indicates the double intention of organizers to place themselves in line with the current government and to directly address it as an institution to lobby on. As mentioned above, the Northern League and its ministers provided support and participated to the Congress.

The sub-title "L'Europa e il Movimento globale Pro-family" (Europe and the Pro-family global movement) makes a double reference: the first relates to the European Union as another political institution addressed: indeed, several panels of the Congress were held on EU family policy. The second reference relates to strategic self-representation: the name this set of lobbying and pro-life organizations appoint themselves with is 'the global pro-family movement'. Interestingly enough, the communication strategy of the Congress aimed at presenting itself as emerging out of a global movement, somehow suggesting that it is brought together by ordinary people gathering from below and spontaneously meeting from different parts of the world, while in fact the World Congress of Families is one of the main activities of a US-based lobby association, the International Organization for Family.

As a whole, the poster (Fig. 4) conveys a positive sense of daydream atmosphere, which is communicated through the choice of pale pastel colors (light blue and lilac), the brightness and over-exposure of the picture and the main subject itself, a girl who is wearing an old-fashioned pilot helmet and paper wings, playing to fly. The poster develops horizontally and is divided into two halves: on the left side there are different frames containing the title of the Congress, the place and the date; on the right side there is the girl playing the pilot. In this way, the poster suggests a causal and temporal relationship between the two sides, one that follows the reading direction: thanks to the Congress (left), children will be happy and free to play (right).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) distinguish between conceptual patterns and narrative patterns of visuals. As mentioned above, within conceptual patterns participants are represented as carriers of a timeless essence. In narrative patterns, the case of the Congress poster is an example of it, subjects are depicted in action and the hallmark of narrative visuals is the presence of a vector. Vectors are formed by "an oblique line, often a quite

strong, diagonal line. (...) The vectors may be formed by bodies or limbs or tools in action” (2006, 59). In the poster, the girl is the only actor depicted and the vector corresponds to her arm, which points towards the sky. Her position entails a set of meanings which resonate with dream, future, progress, etc. Finally, the girl is wearing a lilac T-shirt with a version of the Congress logo that is drawn by a child. This way, the Congress logo and the values it entails are two-time intertwined with children, first by making the logo look like something designed by children themselves, and second, as a symbol that children engage with and happily embody, as envisaged by the act of wearing it.

The reactions that countered the World Congress of Families took several different forms; for the focus of this analysis it is interesting to mention one of the many visual responses to the poster analyzed here. It was elaborated by the local movement area which republished a fake version of the World Congress of Families poster that advertised the Family March held on 31st March with a reversed word order, switching from *La marcia della famiglia* (The to family march) to *La famiglia marcia* (The rotten family), playing with the double meaning of the word *marcia* in Italian, and once again associating the act of denouncing with the one of mocking the event.¹²

To sum, the first point that can be drawn from this analysis relates with the fact that graphic, visual and linguistic choices altogether aim at a catch-all communicative ambience that attempts to convey extreme right and fundamentalist catholic messages through a very progressive-like style, as it is visible from the visual and linguistic choices hinting at ideas of future and change and the absence of religious and right-wing symbols. The second point refers to the use of some populist elements in the communication strategy of the poster. Primarily, the choice of the word cambiamento (change) as part of the Congress title goes in this direction, as it clearly resonates with the 5 Stars Movement-Northern League populist government and shows a complacent attitude towards it. Furthermore, the use of the term pro-family and the category of family as the wide and good category of people, as opposed to other ways of living requires deeper consideration. Questions of gender, LGBTQ+ and women rights, and thus also of values attached to concept of family, remain quite marginal within the study of populism (Mudde 2007; Meret and Siim 2013). The term family is used in both cases analyzed: in Jan Palash concert poster, for instance, family is appointed as the deserving target of welfare chauvinism. In the case of the World Congress of Families, the main written documents¹³ refer to the family as the core cell of society and its relevance is associated with the internal

¹² See: <https://www.facebook.com/Assemblea17dicembre/photos/a.397940793872118/824062341259959/?type=3&theater>

¹³ In the introductory document and in the final declaration of the WFC. See <https://wcfverona.org/it/>

solution of the demographic crisis, implicitly addressing the fear of becoming a minority in one's own country. Ultimately, the term family has come to indicate a category with which people can easily identify and one that is usually associated with positive values. Accordingly, the category of family is strategically deployed to convey a specific political project and a set of conservative values. Particularly in the case of the World Congress of Families, it is made clear how the concept of family can be used to construct 'the people' and how the catholic morality can be transposed from a religious ground to a political one, in a way that well suits the manichean division of the world into right and wrong, good and evil, reproducing the typical demarcation lines of populist rhetoric.

6. Concluding notes

This work shows the relevance of visual analysis in contributing to understand not only the messages conveyed, but especially the ways in which themes and values are expressed by politicized organizations that are differently associated to extreme right and conservative catholic stances. Both posters analyzed share a set commonalities: the first concerns the attempt to spread extreme right and fundamentalist catholic values through mild and moderate visual styles, positive and purposeful vocabulary, producing a type of communicative camouflage that allows these groups and their messages to be agreed upon by a wider public, while simultaneously making the deconstruction of their rhetoric harder for political opponents. A second point of commonality relates with the presence of some populist elements in the communication strategy of the organizations analyzed, such as the reference to welfare chauvinism, the deployment of the term 'family' as a homogenizing category associated with the moral and deserving people, and to the use of specific terms that resonate with the national public discourse of populist parties and leaders.

Finally, the aim of this work – however limited in scope – is not to pinpoint a numerous enough set of populist elements in the communication strategy of such organizations so as to be able to define them as fully populist actors, but rather to uncover the use of some populist elements in the communication strategy of the actors examined. Furthermore, this contribution emphasizes the usefulness of an analysis of visual communication to uncover specific communication strategies, such as communicative camouflage that politicized organizations operating at the edge of the political sphere put in place to bring extremely polarized political stances to a mainstream diffusion, not by moderating the content of their messages, but rather by watering down their communication style and leaving behind highly recognizable and divisive symbols.

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Figure 1: Logo of Nomos - Terra e Identità



Source: Nomos Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Nomos-Terra-e-Identità%20-%202207567869485990/>)

Figure 2 - Nomos' concert poster

19/01/1969 - 19/01/2019

TERRA E LIBERTÀ

**A CINQUANT'ANNI
DAL SUO SACRIFICIO**

Concerto per
JAN PALACH

Parteciperanno alla serata
GABRIELE MARCONI
TOPI NERI
HOBBIT
COMPAGNIA DELL'ANELLO

Con il patrocinio di

provincia  verona  Comune
di Verona
Presidenza del Consiglio Comunale

SABATO 19 GENNAIO ore 21.00

VERONA

INFO E TICKET: nomos.verona@gmail.com **POSTI
LIMITATI**

 **NOMOS**
terra e
identità

Si ringrazia per il contributo  Gli eventuali utili saranno devoluti alle
famiglie veronesi danneggiate

Figure 3: World Congress of Families Logo



Source: WCF webpage (<https://wcfverona.org/it/>)

Figure 4: XIII World Congress of Families poster



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