

## Watching over the Sacred Boundaries of the Family. Study on the Standing Sentinels and Cultural Resistance to LGBT Rights

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*Watching over the Sacred Boundaries of the Family. Study on the Standing Sentinels and Cultural Resistance to LGBT Rights.*

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**Abstract**

The aim of this research is to present an exploratory study that examines some of the cultural assumptions on which the opposition to the social and legal recognition of homosexual marriage in Italy is based. These assumptions are based on a naturalistic anthropology which considers human nature, possibly created by God, structured exclusively in the complementary forms of male and female. Some recurring narrative elements which emerge from the social networks and from websites of a network of traditionalist movements, mainly linked to the Catholic area, are illustrated here, to propose, at the end, an interpretation, including with resort to some of the sociological categories devised by P.T. Berger and T. Luckmann. The naturalized ideas of humankind and the family seem to be the sacred foundations of the symbolic universe of the group; for this reason, the perception of any serious threat to the family is experienced by the members of the group as a serious profanation of the entire sacred order that is based on these foundations. Coherently with this, the forces identified at the origin of the profanation are shown as evil forces that seek to destroy the whole of humanity. The defence of the sacred values of the family therefore assumes the form of defence of cosmic order from the powers that seek to spread chaos.

Keywords: same sex marriage, gender, sacred.

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## 1. Introduction

This study examines some of the cultural assumptions underlying the opposition to the social and legal recognition of homosexual families, which seem to be shared by social movements declaring themselves both Catholic and non-denominational. The latter include the Standing Sentinels (“Sentinelle in Piedi”), a protest movement that came into being to counter the approval of the Scalfarotto Bill, i.e. the proposal to extend the Mancino-Reale law to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity<sup>1</sup>. The movement argues that, under the pretext of protecting the homosexual community from homophobia, the bill actually aims to introduce the “crime of opinion” to eliminate any opposition to the recognition of homosexual families and adoptions.

Although the Standing Sentinels represent the case that started the study, as it deepened and took a broader view of the phenomenon, they steadily went on to occupy the position of one of the many nodes of a larger network where similar conceptions of the family, homosexuality, the individual and society circulate, with their connection also being shown by websites of groups, associations, blogs and publications. The research takes as its starting point the phenomenon of the Standing Sentinels but also relates to the more general context of which they are an example.

### *Importance of the phenomenon*

According to data of the ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), 25.2% of Italians agree very much or quite agree with the statement: “homosexuality is an illness”; 27% with the statement: “homosexuality is immoral”; 25.2% with the statement “homosexuality is a threat for the family”; 37.2% do not agree very much or at all with the statement: “it is fair that a homosexual couple who live together, although not married, can have by law the same rights as a married couple”; 56.1% agree a little or not at all with the statement: “it is fair that a homosexual couple can get married, if they wish”. 76.6% agree a little or not at all with the statement: “it is fair that a couple of lesbians can adopt a child”, which rises to 80.6% if the couple is made up of male homosexuals (ISTAT, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> “Amendments to Law no. 654 of 13 October 1975, and to Law Decree no. 122 of 26 April 1993, which became, with amendments, Law no. 205 of 25 June 1993 on countering homophobia and transphobia”.

[http://www.camera.it/\\_dati/leg17/lavori/stampati/pdf/17PDL0003090.pdf](http://www.camera.it/_dati/leg17/lavori/stampati/pdf/17PDL0003090.pdf). Last consulted: 04/07/2015.

The phenomenon analysed in these pages cannot be circumscribed to a small subculture but expresses positions agreed with by the Catholic Church, the national newspaper *Avvenire*, the magazine *Tempi* and gains the sympathy of political right-wing groups. On the basis of these positions, a national educational project by the UNAR (National Anti-Racial Discrimination Office), “Educating on diversity at school”, was blocked<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, it has an international scope as it follows the French group which inspired it, namely the movement of *Les Veilleurs Debout*, in its motivation, forms and objectives.

#### *Objectives and method*

The main goal of the research is to understand the point of view of the actors, identifying themes and meanings of their narration of reality through an analysis of the texts published on the website of the Standing Sentinels, the “netnographic” visits to their Facebook page and various incursions to “friendly sites” this links to (for example “www.notizieprovita.it”, “www.culturacattolica.it”, “www.uccronline.it”, “www.lanuovabq.it”, “www.lacrocequotidiano.it”, “www.tempi.it” and “www.avvenire.it”), as well as the consultation of texts that have similar views on the same subjects<sup>3</sup>.

The texts on the site “www.sentinelleinpiedi.it” were made up, on 10 February 2015, of 1 article to introduce themselves (“Who the Sentinels are”), 16 articles published in the Blog (including many press releases) and 6 accounts by Sentinels.

The analysis presented is supported by Atlas.ti and TXM software<sup>4</sup>, concerns texts published on the Internet and therefore are not necessarily representative of what the participants in the protests think; however, it can be hypothesized that these two aspects are not contradictory.

The paper is organized as follows: after a description of the phenomenon, the framework of the actors is presented, going into the subject of homosexuality in greater depth to conclude with a theoretical interpretation based on some sociological categories (Berger & Luckmann, 1969), which can in their turn be traced back to the explanatory category of “sacred”. Lastly, there is a brief analysis of the particular “liturgy” of the protest.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.avvenire.it/Cronaca/Pagine/gender-la-scuola-stoppa.aspx](http://www.avvenire.it/Cronaca/Pagine/gender-la-scuola-stoppa.aspx). Last consulted: 23/03/2015.

<sup>3</sup> The quotations from the Standing Sentinels’ site have the title of the article and date of publication between brackets after the quotation. The site was consulted on 10/02/2015. The site was subsequently revised. The sources of the quotations from other sites are shown as footnotes.

<sup>4</sup> <http://textometric.ens-lyon.fr/?lang=fr>. Last consulted: 24/10/2015.

## 2. Watching over values

*General information: who are the Sentinels?*

The magazine *Tempi* states that the Standing Sentinels were started in Brescia on 31 July 2013 on the initiative of eight «young mothers and young fathers», with the aim of:

(...) committing themselves “for their children and for the defence of reality, to a gentle fight, more joyous than any peace” (Lucia). This is the idea: to take the experience of the *Veilleurs Debout*<sup>5</sup>, the French opponents, and quickly organize the first Italian protest. “We will call ourselves Standing Sentinels” (Matteo), with in mind a famous sermon by John Paul II in Washington in 1979: “We will stand up every time that human life is threatened. We will stand up when a child is looked upon only as a means to satisfy an emotional need...”<sup>6</sup>.

They declare themselves to be a «network without affiliation to any political party or confession», set up «to defend the freedom of expression challenged by the Scalfarotto Bill» which they consider to be an authoritarian and liberticidal law. According to the Sentries:

With this law, anyone who make a reference to a model of family founded on the union between a man and a woman, or is against the adoption of children by couples made up of people of the same sex, could be reported and risk up to one year and six months of imprisonment (“Who the Sentinels are”, 4 December 2014).

More than freedom of expression in general, therefore, it is the freedom to express opposition to homosexual marriages and adoptions that is defended<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> *Les Veilleurs Debout* means “standing sentinels” and they also demonstrate, like *La Manif Pour Tous* against the law on homosexual marriage and adoption passed by the Hollande government on 18 May 2013, as well as against the arrest of Nicolas Bernard-Buss. *La Manif Pour Tous* is also present in Italy ([www.lamanifpourtous.fr](http://www.lamanifpourtous.fr), [www.lamanifpourtous.it](http://www.lamanifpourtous.it)).

<sup>6</sup> [www.tempi.it/sentinelle-ecco-chi-sono-davvero-i-libertari-coraggiosi-che-il-5-ottobre-sfideranno-in-silenzio-insulti-e-sputi-in-100-piazze-d-italia#.VPM6BPmG\\_d0](http://www.tempi.it/sentinelle-ecco-chi-sono-davvero-i-libertari-coraggiosi-che-il-5-ottobre-sfideranno-in-silenzio-insulti-e-sputi-in-100-piazze-d-italia#.VPM6BPmG_d0). Last consulted: 01/03/2015.

<sup>7</sup> The idea that this law was liberticidal was maintained despite the fact that in the first pages of the Bill under accusation the fears linked to the possibility that freedom of

According to the magazine *Tempi*, on 31 December 2014, the Standing Sentinels had created local groups in 150 towns and cities, organized 199 protests and involved 40,000 people<sup>8</sup>.

*Les Veilleurs Debout and the Standing Sentinels*

The protests of the Sentinels bring together at the most a few hundred participants, but they are fairly frequent and distributed throughout Italy. The participants protest in the style of *Les Veilleurs Debout*: in silence, standing up straight and at a distance of one or two metres apart.

*Les Veilleurs Debout*, in answers to some questions I asked them by contacting them on Facebook, came into being on 24 June 2013 from another similar group, called *Les Veilleurs*<sup>9</sup>, and on 31 August 2013, they changed their name to *Les Sentinelles*. As far as the form of their protest is concerned, they were inspired by Erdem Gündüz, a dancer, performer and choreographer born in Turkey<sup>10</sup>, who implemented it for the first time in the protests in Taksim Square in 2013. Nicknamed *the standing man*<sup>11</sup>, in Turkish *Duran Adam*,

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action and of opinion is violated are taken into consideration and scaled down: «It has been maintained that the extension of the Mancino-Reale law could lead to the conviction of a mother who suggested to her daughter not to marry a bisexual and to a father who decided not to rent a house in his possession to his son who wanted to go and live in the property with his male partner. It is clear that in a normal procedural dynamic, this textbook hypothesis can never take place for one very simple reason, which is that the Mancino-Reale law is based on a notion of discrimination the meaning of which can be taken from both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and from the mentioned New York Convention (...). The legal interest protected is therefore clearly identified. [...] In addition, the offence described by the Mancino-Reale law is very clear and precise, identifying behaviour which goes far beyond the simple expression of an opinion. It punishes instigation to commit discrimination or violence, not mere opinions, even when they express prejudice» (“Amendments to law no. 654 of 13 October 1975 and to Bill no. 122 of 26 April 1993, passed, with amendments, by law no. 205 of 25 June 1994, to fight homophobia and transphobia”, pp. 2 and 3).

<sup>8</sup> “Un anno di Sentinelle in piedi. Tra accuse, scontri e il propagarsi contagioso di ‘un’amicizia”. [www.tempi.it/un-anno-di-sentinelle-in-piedi-tra-accuse-scontri-e-il-propagarsi-contagioso-di-un-amicizia#.VRVkf\\_mG\\_d0](http://www.tempi.it/un-anno-di-sentinelle-in-piedi-tra-accuse-scontri-e-il-propagarsi-contagioso-di-un-amicizia#.VRVkf_mG_d0).

Last consulted: 27/03/2015

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/LesVeilleursOfficiel?\\_\\_mref=message](https://www.facebook.com/LesVeilleursOfficiel?__mref=message). Last consulted: 29/03/2015.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.erdemgunduz.org/index.htm>. Last consulted: 28/03/2015.

<sup>11</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/18/world/europe/turkey-protests/#>. Last consulted: 28/03/2015.

he became one of its symbols: «the protest by Duran Adam or “the standing man” exploded virally over the Internet. Other young people joined Erdem in the square, remaining still a few metres from him so that it could not be considered a gathering»<sup>12</sup>. *Les Sentinelles* describe the creation of the group as follows:

On 2013-06-24, a watchman called Jean-Baptiste, decided to stand in front of the Ministry of Justice for a few hours, protesting against the political judgment sentencing Nicolas Bernard-Buss to jail for his opinions with immediate custody without waiting for the appeal judgment. This kind of protest was initially invented by Erdem Gunduz in Turkey<sup>13</sup>. Jean-Baptiste's watch was relayed by social networks and about 10 persons decided to relay, standing at the same place during the whole following night. In the next day, hundreds of people came at various hours in the day and decided to watch. They were expelled by the riot police, but came back in the following days. Even after the appeal court released Nicolas Bernard-Buss in July 2013, “les Veilleurs debouts” continued to stand and watch thereafter, until now.

The model seemed to be that of a protest that spread through the Internet: «there is no organization and no spokesman, just people protesting in the same manner and from times to times able to coordinate themselves». Their protests have a variable degree of organization:

(...) in Bordeaux, Tours, Nancy, Nantes, “Les Sentinelles” are deciding to watch at the same time in the same place. In Paris, such organized events may exist and this is when the audience is crowded, but any person may watch at any time of the day or night spontaneously in Place Vendôme. Almost everyday, people are spending some portion of their time watching Place Vendôme.

In the case of the Standing Sentinels, the participants read a book, are arranged in a chessboard formation and their protest lasts one hour, all of which is not the case of the French sentinels.

The latter protest at a distance from each other in order to avoid being considered an unauthorized public demonstration, as in the case of Taksim

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<sup>12</sup> <http://xl.repubblica.it/articoli/duranadam-luomo-che-resiste-a-piazza-taksim/3901/> Last consulted: 28/03/2015.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2013/06/18/turquie-les-hommes-debout-nouvelles-icomes-de-taksim\\_911811](http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2013/06/18/turquie-les-hommes-debout-nouvelles-icomes-de-taksim_911811). Link included in the answer.



Square: «It is essential for us to respect distance between us plus silence plus absence of banners or slogans in order to avoid being deemed a demonstration under legal criteria». On the contrary, the protests by the Standing Sentinels are authorized and their form, therefore, has only symbolic reasons. In addition, *Les Sentinelles* can protest even when there are few of them, or even only one of them<sup>14</sup>, whilst the Standing Sentinels are always in a group and the organizers, as emerged from the observation of one of their protests, help the protesters to line up to form a studied scenography in the public space with their bodies. The Standing Sentinels stay for one hour, whereas the protests of the *Sentinelles* do not have a pre-established duration, even though the organized ones have a starting time.

At the protests of the Standing Sentinels there are “totems” with their logo and equipment to amplify the words of the spokesperson, who at the start of the protest reads out the reasons for the protest. This organization is not present with the *Les Sentinelles*.

Although the Standing Sentinels describe the movement as “spontaneous resistance”, this spontaneous character appears interpretable especially in reference to the free participation by anyone in the protest, which is, on the contrary, organized and regulated in the forms.

Upstream of the movement there also seems to be some form of organization, even though it may be based on voluntary work. There is a Facebook page and an official website, press releases are written and the “Sentinelle in Piedi” trademark has been registered<sup>15</sup>, all of which are phenomena that refer to choices that cannot be said to be from the spontaneous multiplicity of individuals. The site, however, gives particular importance to the horizontal dimension of the movement:

Who finances the Standing Sentinels? Which occult hand is pulling the strings of a resistance which is growing day after day? Who is responsible for the sophisticated communication of this network which has made space for itself through silence, despite the hostility of the

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<sup>14</sup> «(...) Un camion de CRS pour 1 #Sentinelle plantée dans le froid», post on Facebook page “Les Sentinelles”, [www.facebook.com/lessentinelles/photos/a.608955682484525.1073741836.603529186360508/946514755395281/?type=1&theater](http://www.facebook.com/lessentinelles/photos/a.608955682484525.1073741836.603529186360508/946514755395281/?type=1&theater). Last consulted: 27/03/2015.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Economic Development, Italian Office of Patents and Trademarks, 25 October 2013, [http://www.uibm.gov.it/uibm/dati/stampa\\_elenco\\_info.aspx?load=info\\_stampMain&id=2200157&table=TradeMark](http://www.uibm.gov.it/uibm/dati/stampa_elenco_info.aspx?load=info_stampMain&id=2200157&table=TradeMark). Last consulted: 11/06/2015.

mainstream? And, above all, what makes all these people go into the streets?

These are questions that we hear repeated every time we protest. They are legitimate questions, asked at times to really understand the soul of this popular experience, at times by those who do not know any other way but to pigeonhole people according to a preconceived pattern that is of a political, cultural or religious nature. But the network of the Standing Sentinels is something different: unique on the Italian scene, which lies outside these categories (...). [...] ours is none other but spontaneous resistance, which has grown by contagion, built up with friendship, based on this common love for man and his freedom which is achieved in adhering to a truth written in the heart of each and every one of us (“People are not categories, all children have the right to a mother and a father, we are not an association, but a friendship”, 18 December 2014).

A fact that is perhaps unusual for a fairly well-known social movement, is the absence of a dedicated Wikipedia page<sup>16</sup>. Communication from the Standing Sentinels is exclusively through their website, their Facebook pages, the press releases, which are also published by the Catholic weekly *Tempi*, and their protests.

*The website and the Facebook page of the Standing Sentinels*

On 24 March 2015, the Standing Sentinels have a national Facebook page with 14,680 fans and 97 pages dedicated to individual towns and cities which have from 71 fans (Livorno) to 2,309 fans (Milan). Only six pages have more than 1,000 fans (Milan, Rome, Cagliari, Verona, Brescia and Bergamo)<sup>17</sup>.

The *wordclouds* of the most frequent terms in the website and the Facebook page present a snapshot of the subjects discussed<sup>18</sup>. In that of the site “person” stands out and in that of the Facebook page there also appears

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<sup>16</sup> A page seems to have been opened but it was then deleted due to copyright infringement.

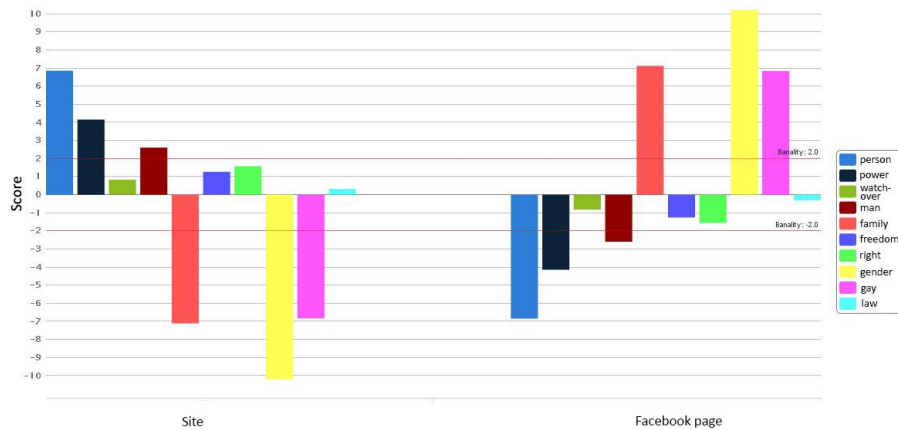
[http://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentinelle\\_in\\_piedi](http://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentinelle_in_piedi). Last consulted: 27/03/2015.

<sup>17</sup> On 24.03.2016 the number of fans of the Facebook page had increased to 21,801.

<sup>18</sup> Done with “wordclouds”: <http://www.wordclouds.com/>. Last consulted: 30/10/2015.



FIGURE 2. Specificity index computed (TXM). Histogram of the 10 most frequent lemmas in the corpus made up of the texts on the website and the Facebook page. Author's translation.



### Nature vs. gender

Gender ideology, or gender theory, is a crucial category in the narration of the Standing Sentinels and similar groups. The “Treccani Dizionario di Filosofia” [Dictionary of Philosophy] defines “gender” as a concept: «introduced into the context of human and social sciences to designate the many and complex ways in which the differences between the sexes gain significance and become structural factors in the organization of social life» (Treccani - Dizionario di filosofia, 2009). The gender theory to which the Standing Sentinels refer, however, indicates the contents of LGBT propaganda which they deem is spread by the mass media and even in schools<sup>20</sup>. Educational programmes such as those encouraged by the UNAR

<sup>20</sup> Various scholars have observed that the “gender theory” presented by these movements does not correspond to what has been worked through in the academic studies in this sector. The sociologist Chiara Saraceno, amongst others, has also spoken on this. In an interview given to the newspaper La Repubblica on 17 May 2015, for example, she says: «in actual fact there are many gender theories. The concept of gender was developed by American feminists to underline how the social roles attributed to one sex or the other are social constructions. To put it simply: the fact the man works for a salary and the woman stays at home, or that men earn more than women, or that men are involved in politics more than women does not come from the conformation of the body, just as the fact that women are by nature more passive, gentler and men more aggressive and so on, does not come from the conformation of the body: these are all social constructs. The body is important, the conformation of the body is also something that has to be reflected on, thought about and elaborated, in short, we do not ignore how we are made, but the body does not

brochures previously mentioned, are understood as propaganda aimed at indoctrinating minors.

The ideology of gender<sup>21</sup> is believed to teach children that: «(...) they will have to choose in the future whether to be a man or a woman... it depends on how they feel!» as stated in an advert of the Pro Vita association<sup>22</sup>. The newspaper *Avvenire* dedicates an issue of its supplement to gender theory<sup>23</sup> writing that «The gendered identity, i.e. being men and women, is replaced by the identity of gender (“feeling” these, regardless of the biological element). And it can vary as desired, even keeping the biological element unchanged»<sup>24</sup>.

The Standing Sentinels are therefore not alone in their fight against “gender” but are part of a well-defined social, cultural and virtual network, having in common similar values and objectives. In the social networks, this network appears in the links that refer to similar associations. Here are some examples. The Standing Sentinels protest:

(...) for the freedom of expression and for the protection of the natural family based on the union between man and woman (“Who the Sentinels are”, 4 December 2014).

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determine psychological characteristics or social behaviour. [...] For a few years, some women scholars who came from feminism and have approached the Catholic Church – as well as the Catholic hierarchy in Italy – have on the other hand translated gender theories into a single large theory, built up like an enemy to fight. The construction of this monolithic theory has as its target the acceptance of homosexuality as one of the ways in which one can be in the world, as men and as women. Gender theory has been translated as a sort of theory of the androgen in which sexual difference counts for nothing, like a theory that says: “If I want, I can become a homosexual. As though being homosexual meant going to the Seychelles or staying at home”. This use of gender theories is misinterpreted as they do not concern homosexuality or heterosexuality, which are only some of the ways to be in the world».

[http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2015/05/17/news/giornata\\_contro\\_l\\_omofobia\\_chiara\\_saraceno\\_la\\_teoria\\_gender\\_non\\_esiste\\_-114469481/](http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2015/05/17/news/giornata_contro_l_omofobia_chiara_saraceno_la_teoria_gender_non_esiste_-114469481/) . Last consulted: 08/06/2015. “On the use and abuse” of the category of gender, also see Bernini (Bernini, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Writing about “gender theory” or “gender ideology” in the continuation of this paper, reference will be made to the actors’ interpretation of it.

<sup>22</sup> [www.notizieprovita.it/notizie-dallitalia/video-gender-a-scuola-una-firma-per-il-no](http://www.notizieprovita.it/notizie-dallitalia/video-gender-a-scuola-una-firma-per-il-no). Last consulted: 28/03/2015.

<sup>23</sup> “Gender, la grande bugia”, *Noi Genitori e Figli*, supplement to *Avvenire* of 22 February 2015, numero 193, anno XIX.

<sup>24</sup> [www.avvenire.it/famiglia/Pagine/gender-CINQUE-PUNTI-PER-FARE-CHIAREZZA.aspx](http://www.avvenire.it/famiglia/Pagine/gender-CINQUE-PUNTI-PER-FARE-CHIAREZZA.aspx). Last consulted: 02/03/2015.

The association *Giuristi per la Vita*:

(...) has the aim of promoting, defending and protecting the right to life [...] the concept of life includes the natural structure of the family, understood as the union between a man and a woman based on marriage<sup>25</sup>.

The Pro Vita initiative:

(...) aims to encourage the values of Life (...) and of the Family based on the marriage between a man and a woman<sup>26</sup>.

The association *Le Manif Pour Tous Italia* has:

(...) the purpose of mobilizing Italian citizens (...) on the issues regarding the recent laws on homophobia and transphobia, theory of gender, homosexual marriage and adoptions. Its aim is to guarantee the freedom of expression, preserve the uniqueness of marriage between a man and a woman and the right of a child to have a father and a mother<sup>27</sup>.

The term *gender* also recurs in the words of Cardinal Bagnasco:

(...) these attempts to insert, almost stealthily, this type of vision which comes from gender, with the excuse of emotional education or sexual education, is a serious mistake and not only that: it is a serious authoritarian violence (...)<sup>28</sup>.

and above all of Pope Francis:

Ideological colonization: I'll give just one example that I saw myself. Twenty years ago, in 1995, a minister of education asked for a large loan to build schools for the poor. They gave it to her on the condition that in the schools there would be a book for the children of a certain

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<sup>25</sup> [www.giuristiperlavita.org/joomla/chisiamo/atto-costitutivo-e-statuto](http://www.giuristiperlavita.org/joomla/chisiamo/atto-costitutivo-e-statuto). Last consulted 03/03/2015.

<sup>26</sup> [www.notizieprovita.it/missione](http://www.notizieprovita.it/missione). Last consulted: 03/03/2015.

<sup>27</sup> [www.lamanifpourtous.it/sitehome/manifesto](http://www.lamanifpourtous.it/sitehome/manifesto). Last consulted: 03/03/2015.

<sup>28</sup> [www.avvenire.it/Chiesa/Pagine/Bagnasco-educazione-affettiva-no-al-gender.aspx](http://www.avvenire.it/Chiesa/Pagine/Bagnasco-educazione-affettiva-no-al-gender.aspx). Last consulted: 03/03/2015.

level, no? It was a school book, a book prepared well, didactically, in which gender theory was taught. [...] This is ideological colonization: They introduce to the people an idea that has nothing to do with the nation. Yes, with groups of people, but not with the nation. And they colonize the people with an idea which changes, or wants to change, a mentality or a structure. [...] But it is not new, this. The same was done by the dictatorships of the last century. They entered with their own doctrine – think of the Balilla, think of the Hitler Youth. They colonized the people, but they wanted to do it. But how much suffering<sup>29</sup>.

The “non-confessional affiliation” underlined by the Sentinels, by similar movements but also by explicitly Catholic movements in relation to their opposition to the legal recognition of homosexual couples, adoptions and the “gender theory”, can be understood in relation to the underlying “naturalist” anthropology: if the truth they state is based on nature, then it is universal and independent of faith:

Our network cannot be labelled nor can it be pigeonholed in pre-established patterns because it is not linked to any group, association or movement. We are free citizens with different backgrounds who decide to protect in a totally individual way, for a crucial cause that concerns everyone, independently of their political or religious belonging and even sexual inclination (Press release of 14 March 2014).

Nevertheless, the accounts present on the site of the Standing Sentinels do not conceal religious references:

The Pope is right: the sentinel today has unexpectedly become above all a nurse, because yes, the Church today is a field hospital, in this injured world (“Standing Sentinels: wounds become openings”, letter, 3 December 2014).

The contradiction is only apparent, if we consider that human nature, if conceived as created by God according to an ethical project, is intrinsically pervaded by religious values considered natural and with universal validity. From a Catholic perspective, appealing to human nature or to religious values is the same. The accent on human nature, however, appears to underline in

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<sup>29</sup>[http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/01/19/papa\\_aereo\\_trascrizione\\_integrale\\_de\\_l\\_testo/1119009](http://it.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/01/19/papa_aereo_trascrizione_integrale_de_l_testo/1119009). Last consulted: 02/03/2015.

particular universalistic and pre-cultural character of values, which ideally would be independent of any explicit profession of faith, as they are considered rooted in the anthropological reality of man.

*General structure of the frame of reference of the Sentinels*

The analysis aimed to identify the main subjects of narration of the Standing Sentinels and the characteristics attributed to them. On the site, the subject remains relatively concrete, but more allusive references also appear to “power” “pensée unique” and a call to an “infinite” which they all hear. For example:

(the testimony of the Sentinels, *Editor's note*) concerns the conscience of each man and the desire for the infinite which everyone – even those who oppose us – has at the bottom of their heart (“Who the Sentinels are”, 4 December 2014).

(...) a power that tends to reduce the need for truth and the infinite need innate in every human being (Ibid.).

(...) reminds him of the truth, that he has a tremendous need for something other than himself, that he cannot be self-determined (Ibid.).

They are vague formulas which however seem to refer to something of fundamental importance. For this reason too, the study has opened up to other sources, allowing a more articulate and coherent picture to be obtained.

In general, the actors on the stage are the Sentinels, power and gay and financial lobbies. The judiciary, homosexuals (who are with the lobbies or with the Sentinels), the masses and the hecklers of the protest. We will now try to present, synthetically, some central aspects of this narration.

*The light: the Sentinels and the truth*

The Sentinels defend threatened human nature, i.e. the values of the person and the natural family. When describing themselves, they say they are awake, knowers of the truth and not manipulated, like the masses, by the “pensée unique”:

Standing Sentinels is resistance formed by people who watch over what is happening in society, denouncing every occasion when there is an



attempt to destroy man and civilization. The Sentinels protest silently in public to awaken numbed and passive consciences in the face of the *pensée unique* (“Who the Sentinels are”, 4 December 2014).

The Sentinels see in their protests a way of testifying the truth and reawakening consciences: (...) there where consciences sleep, we will take a free testimony of truth (“Not an association but a network, not protest but friendship”, 6 December 2014).

The word “truth” is fundamental. The “truth” of the Standing Sentinels is opposed to “lie”, characteristic of “power”:

(...) only a conscience that cannot be reduced to every homogenisation and lie can change the logic of a power that instead of serving man seeks to control it (“Who the Sentinels are”, 4 December 2014).

“Truth” does not have the meaning commonly attributed to it. The “gender glossary” of the association *Giuristi per la Vita* explains how it is to be understood:

The language of reality:

“Truth”: what is true. What corresponds to reality. It expresses and reflects reality accurately. By definition there is only one truth. It is the truth that makes a man free, i.e. capable of choosing good. The human body is the bearer of truth (has a meaning).

The language of gender:

“Relativism”: everything is relative. Each person has their own truth. The body is not a bearer of any truth<sup>30</sup>.

“Truth” means reality, freedom, moral good and nature all at the same time. The word “truth” incorporates ontology, ethics, aesthetics and gnoseology, and this makes it more similar to a sacred symbol than to a concept (Geertz, 1957). The reference to the Catholic category of “natural law” and more in general to a philosophical and moral approach of a realist type can be seen.

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<sup>30</sup> [www.giuristiperlavita.org/joomla/PDF-DOCUMENTI/Lessico-6d.pdf](http://www.giuristiperlavita.org/joomla/PDF-DOCUMENTI/Lessico-6d.pdf). Last consulted: 02/03/2015.

*The darkness: power, the gay and financial lobbies*

“Power” is the political expression of economic lobbies which feed a superficial culture – of an individual, consumerist and relativist type – motivated by interests to which they are ready to sacrifice anything at all, even the inviolable values of human life:

(...) a power which crushes everything in the mincer of usefulness, in the now lifeless games of declining politics, of a system enslaved to the sole logic of economic interest, to the “commodification” of the human being, to the anaesthetization of the conscience (“Standing Sentinels: wounds become openings”, letter, 3 December 2014).

It is a power that manipulates the masses à la Orwell, diffusing the “pensée unique” through the mass media, but the Sentinels are immune to it:

Modern power uses this method through a systematic and pervasive offer of partial and immediate answers, delivered by voices and images which through technology reach us in continuation, everywhere, almost without pause (Who the Sentinels are, 4 December 2014).

(...) the Standing Sentinels protest in the streets (...) to make man free now from the pensée unique, to emancipate him from deceit (Press release of 28 November 2014).

Similarly, the LGBT lobbies exploit homosexuals by claiming rights in their name but without actually representing them:

(...) the greatest deceptions of the policies carried on by the LGBT associations is to build up an opposition between homosexuals and heterosexuals, but this is only an enormous and unacceptable mystification. Opposing factions do not exist except in the intentions of those who, disguised as champions of rights, want to impose a homosexual “pensée unique” (Press release of 14 March 2014).

Many homosexuals would not be interested in rights, on the contrary:

(...) the LGBT lobby, in actual fact claims the right to speak on behalf of all homosexual or transsexual people, without considering that amongst them there are people who are against claiming rights based

on sexual orientation. Many of these people protest silently with us in the streets (Press release of 27 March 2014).

The rights are described as whims of wealthy homosexuals:

And in this world, the fashion (...) is that (...) of an ideology that carries on the cause of those few homosexuals (so-called gays, usually very affluent) who want some rights recognized (“My experience amongst the Standing Sentinels”, letter, 13 December 2014).

They are also, however, described as functional to creating new markets to exploit, such as that of human reproduction:

Q) Excuse-me, when you say “homosexuals are exploited only for – their - purposes (...): who are “their”? Who are you referring to exactly?  
R) For example Planned Parenthood<sup>31</sup>.

The subject of power and money appears with tones of varying darkness depending on the articles and the comments present on the various sites. For example, in an article in the magazine *Orientamenti Pastoralis* on “gender theory”, it says that promoting gender theory «leads to man no longer counting for anything, and the occult motive is, in the final analysis, economic advantage» (Tettamanti, 2015: 80), whilst on another site, reference is made more strongly to a company that is believed to be part of the:

(...) worldwide crusade against the natural unquestionable human values and has become another operative and propagandistic arm of the masonic lobbies of high finance; it agrees in full with the lies and distorted visions of real life, from abortion to euthanasia, from the absurd gay claims to assisted procreation of these lobbies<sup>32</sup>.

In this scenario dominated by power and falsity, the Scalfarotto Bill serves to eliminate the opposition and open the way to homosexual rights:

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<sup>31</sup> Interactions stimulated by a question I asked a user of the Facebook page of the Standing Sentinels. Planned Parenthood «is America’s most trusted provider of reproductive health care», [www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/who-we-are#sthash.1dsOrOG6.dpuf](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/who-we-are#sthash.1dsOrOG6.dpuf). Last consulted: 20/03/2015.

<sup>32</sup> [www.notizieprovita.it/economia-e-vita/perche-la-tutela-dei-consumatori-e-gay-friendly](http://www.notizieprovita.it/economia-e-vita/perche-la-tutela-dei-consumatori-e-gay-friendly). Last consulted: 28/02/2015.

(...) it is not at all, as they want us to believe, to protect people with homosexual tendencies from aggression and violence (...) but has the sole aim of acting as a trailblazer to a series of laws based on presumed negated rights (Press release of 11 June 2014).

Part of the judiciary is working to achieve the same objectives, introducing (...) through decisions the “production” of children by people even of the same sex (Press release of 28 November 2014).

Just as the Scalfarotto Bill is of a despotic matrix, gender theory also allows glimpses of the shadow of dictatorship:

If the subversive changes fostered by gender do not stop expanding, our civilizations could lose the meaning of what humanity is and in the end disappear not to the advantage of a perfect world but in a free fall towards barbarity and totalitarianism<sup>33</sup>.

And in *Avvenire*:

(Gender is dangerous because, *Editor's note*) it is a real attack on the freedom of thought and education by a minority (gendercracy)<sup>34</sup>.

The Pope himself, quoted above, associated gender theory and totalitarianism.

The subject of power and profit is central. Overlooking the most extreme visions that refer to dark and disturbing plots, power, profit and the ideology of gender seem to be united by the connective tissue of contemporary capitalism. The idea underlying this connection seems to be the following: social groups (lobbies) that do not recognize another God than the God Money, can only consider the sacred and non-negotiable values that protect particular areas of society such as the family, procreation and children, as obstacles that prevent invading sectors potentially capable of generating profit with the market logic. They will therefore try to desacralize them, to break down the sacred enclosure to “enter the temple” and transform into goods everything they find there. The ideology of gender appears to be considered as an articulation of capitalist ideology and as one of the tools implemented to

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<sup>33</sup> [www.notizieprovita.it/notizie-dal-mondo/imporre-lideologia-gender-e-un-crimine-contro-lumanita/](http://www.notizieprovita.it/notizie-dal-mondo/imporre-lideologia-gender-e-un-crimine-contro-lumanita/). Last consulted: 02/03/2015.

<sup>34</sup> [www.avvenire.it/famiglia/Pagine/gender-CINQUE-PUNTI-PER-FARE-CHIAREZZA.aspx](http://www.avvenire.it/famiglia/Pagine/gender-CINQUE-PUNTI-PER-FARE-CHIAREZZA.aspx). Last consulted: 02/03/2015.

make believe that nothing is sacred or natural to man, as everything is a cultural creation and subject to his unlimited will. In this way would break down the natural ethical limits which curb unrestrained desires, individual “whims”, including the rights claimed by homosexuals and LGBT associations, and would arrive at the construction of the perfect consumer and a world pervaded by the market logic:

Gender theory and the political practice that supports it is in fact the theory and construction of the perfect consumer adapted to the biopolitical market of drives and enjoyment (which excludes the satisfaction of the subject), adapted to the pervasive market of eroticism (...) (Mario Binasco, interview in *Avvenire*, *Noi Genitori e Figli*: “Gender, la grande bugia”, 2015).

### 3. The homosexuals

*“Male and female created He them” (Gen 1,27)*

The idea of homosexual that emerges from the texts appears comprehensible if traced back to the anthropological assumption of the existence of only two sexes that exhaust human nature: male and female. Christian anthropology is perfectly in line with this assumption: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them” (Gen 1,27).

This assumption, whether founded on nature as divine creation or on nature as a fact of reality, necessarily leads to denying the existence of a homosexual identity, but also of an opposition between heterosexuals and homosexuals. Identities in opposition cannot exist if the contender does not exist:

(the, *Editor’s note*) opposition between “homosexuals” and “heterosexuals” that does not exist. [...] It does not exist because the only duality possible and really founding of us all is that man/woman and who states the contrary speaking of self-determination as is increasingly happening in schools as well unknown to parents, lies (“People are not categories, all children have a right to a mother and father, we are not an association but a friendship”, 18 December 2014).

Only the person exists:

The Sentinels do not accept misleading categories such as “gay” or “heterosexual” because they know that they are only to make us forget the infinite value of each person (“Who the Sentinels are”, 4 December 2014).

*On a path against Nature, towards the inhuman*

In this frame of reference, the claims of homosexual couples appear as distortions of the natural order and take on negative moral connotations. The homosexuals who want to oppose nature oppose good as well, with recourse to practices such as purchase (womb for hire) and the production of babies (heterologous fertilization), considered in the same way as commodities:

They are entitled to a mother and a father and above all to be born from a gratuitous act of love, without having been fabricated like objects ready for consumption (Press release of 6 October 2014).

It is a requirement of a club (...). It also opens the doors to the hell of buying and selling babies, because the procedures of wombs for hire are nothing but a commodification that humiliates woman (...) and is violent for the child (...) torn from its mother's breast to be handed over to a couple who have brutally bought it (...) with clauses “of guarantee” so that if “the product is defective” or not in line with the wishes expressed via the catalogue, it is returned to the sender<sup>35</sup>.

*Love as sacrifice and narcissism*

Love is defined as a sacrifice connected with generating a new life. Love incapable of sacrifice corresponds to narcissistic love. This leads to the two interpretations relative to the desire for parenthood and the claim of the right to marriage of homosexuals. The desire to have a child is interpreted as a “whim”, “desire” in the sense of an infantile and superficial impulse, fed by a consumerist culture to which is opposed the deeper culture of a child as a gift and vocation:

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<sup>35</sup> [www.lacroequotidiano.it/articolo/2014/10/09/politica/i-numeri-della-condizione-omosessuale-in-italia](http://www.lacroequotidiano.it/articolo/2014/10/09/politica/i-numeri-della-condizione-omosessuale-in-italia). Last consulted: 01/03/2015.

The right of the “gays” wants to limit (...) the right of children to have a father and a mother (...): love therefore which does not contemplate the right of others (...) is narcissistic, even when the sentiment is undeniable. This is the opposite of marriage and the natural family (“My experience amongst the Standing Sentinels”, letter, 13 December 2014).

The desire to see socially legitimized what is only a sentimental union is understood as demonstration of the incomprehension of the real meaning of marriage. What homosexuals call “love” is only an individualistic sentiment, which is opposed to the authentic love which strengthens society:

Establishing homosexual marriage therefore means changing the meaning of the word marriage and reducing it to its sole sentimental aspect. If it is true that the family is the founding structure of society (...) introducing marriage “*pour tous*” (...) means destroying society. Many people and myself are not interested in living in chaos and in the individualism that follows, but that is also the cause of it (“My experience amongst the Standing Sentinels”, letter, 13 December 2014).

*Who really is the homosexual person?*

Homosexuals are defined as people with an “injured identity and sexual sphere” who can be accompanied to find their “true identity” again: male or female. The homosexual is described as a lost soul, in search of themselves, who can be helped by associations that offer forms of pastoral accompaniment. *Obiettivo Chaire* is one of them:

(...) it does not operate in psychotherapy but in pastoral accompaniment, with special attention on the injured identity and sexual sphere, including homosexuality (...) helping people to successfully find their identity again (Press release of 9 January 2015).

References to other associations are found in the Pro Vita site:

Then I learned about (...) the theories of Professor Nicolosi. According to these, homosexuality is actually “latent heterosexuality”. If the person desires to rediscover their masculinity or femininity, which was given to them by nature, with the right help and support on a path of conversion, they can find their real identity again. Deep down, behind

everything, there are painful wounds that date back to childhood and adolescence (...). These are the wounds that have to be healed<sup>36</sup>.

On the site of the newspaper *Avvenire*, reference is made to projects for the welcome of homosexuals, to be diffused by every diocese<sup>37</sup>, and on the site of the Standing Sentinels, there is the testimony of a “homosexual” who has found himself again:

It is not a question of having children or not, of being excited by a person of the same or a different sex, nor of knowing whether marriage will be your vocation or not.

It is about looking up from your pain and thanking God for it, because only by accepting your pain, can we recognize that of others. And help them. [...] After having believed for so long that it was my sexual orientation that said who I am, after having defined myself for years as homosexual, considering myself an innocent victim of life, today, for the first time I feel I am a man, grateful to that same life by which I thought I was refused (“I, homosexual, at the protest of Standing Sentinels, am here too for those who are over there”, 4 December 2014).

#### 4. An interpretation

After having tried to reconstruct the point of view of the actors on some subjects deemed significant, an interpretation is suggested which radically reverse the perspective, applying some sociological categories devised by Berger and Luckmann (Berger & Luckmann, 1991[1966]). If the category of nature is crucial in the narration of the Standing Sentinels, that of culture is from a constructionist point of view. The system of thought examined can then be read as a reified symbolic universe. Reification is: «the apprehension

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<sup>36</sup> Link posted by a user of the Facebook page of the Standing Sentinels to my request for references. <http://www.notizieprovita.it/notizie-dallitalia/una-casa-per-levangelizazione-della-famiglia/>. Last consulted: 27.02.2015.

Joseph Nicolosi is a psychologist and psychotherapist who offers reparative therapy for homosexuality in his clinic, the “Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic”. The first page of his website begins with this sentence: «If gay doesn't define you, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE GAY». As it says on his site, «his specialty is the treatment of men who wish to diminish their same-sex attractions and develop their heterosexual potential». <http://www.josephnicolosi.com/>. Last consulted: 04/07/2015.

<sup>37</sup> [www.avvenire.it/famiglia/Pagine/noi-gender.aspx](http://www.avvenire.it/famiglia/Pagine/noi-gender.aspx). Last consulted: 01/03/2015.



of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products - such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will» (Berger & Luckmann, 1991: 106).

To preserve its symbolic universe, the social group implements mechanisms aimed at fighting the assertion of alternative symbolic universes. In particular, the negation of every identity that cannot be traced back to male or female can be interpreted as a process of “nihilation”, useful «to liquidate conceptually everything outside the same universe. [...] Nihilation denies the reality of whatever phenomena or interpretations of phenomena do not fit into that universe» (Berger & Luckmann, 1991: 132).

The second strategy of preservation of the symbolic universes proposed by Berger and Luckmann, “therapy”, also appears appropriate to interpret what has emerged: «Therapy entails the application of conceptual machinery to ensure that actual or potential deviants stay within the institutionalized definitions of reality. [...] Its specific institutional arrangements, from exorcism to psycho-analysis, from pastoral care to personnel counselling programmes, belong, of course, under the category of social control». Therapy: «requires a body of knowledge that include a theory of deviance, a diagnostic apparatus, and a conceptual system for the “cure of souls”» (Berger & Luckmann, 1991: 130-131). The theory of deviation relative to homosexuality is made up, in this case, of a sociological aspect – a world dominated by economic power, relativism and consumerism – and by a psychological aspect, i.e. “wounded identity”. Therapy can be effective: «Successful therapy establishes a symmetry between the conceptual machinery and its subjective appropriation in the individual's consciousness; it re-socializes the deviant into the objective reality of the symbolic universe of the society. There is, of course, considerable subjective satisfaction in such a return to “normalcy”» (Berger & Luckmann, 1991: 132).

This is an interpretation which the groups analysed could not agree with, on the contrary: it is exactly the vision of reality they oppose. This creates a stimulating conceptual short circuit which highlights how these groups are opposing a vision of the world which is incompatible with theirs: a vision which leads what they consider as anchored to the natural, or divine, reality of things back to man.

Now, the explanation of the activation and of the nature of the strategies illustrated by Berger and Luckmann seems to lie, in my opinion, in the sacredness of the principles on which the symbolic universe under examination is founded. Whether it is a religious sacredness or connected with an anthropological and moral realism is of little importance. Sacredness characterizes the fundamental principles, “the load-bearing columns” of the symbolic universe: by making these principles inviolable, the sacred protects

the whole cultural universe from destruction (Righetti, 2014). But protection of the symbolic order is also accompanied by a vision of evil. As Graham and Haidt have written: «the visions of sacredness are (...) part of ideological narratives in which the evil one or ones play a starring role» (Graham & Haidt, 2011: 11). As this refers to the risk that the symbolic order is destroyed, every serious threat to the sacred principles evokes the phantom of the forces of evil, the dystopia of a world adrift or, to freely quote the anthropologist De Martino, refers to the end of the world (De Martino, 1977).

It is, in this case, a world (which for the actors, is *the* world), founded on an idea of man articulated, exclusively, in two genders: male and female. By their very existence, the homosexual or the transsexual violates and therefore challenges the system of cultural classification which is a fundamental element of every vision of the world. The fundamental and therefore sacral importance of sexual duality and the fatal danger represented by gender theory to the whole world order, specifically the Catholic one, was made fully explicit by Pope Benedict XVI in a speech of 21 December 2012:

According to the biblical creation account, being created by God as male and female pertains to the essence of the human creature. This duality is an essential aspect of what being human is all about, as ordained by God. This very duality as something previously given is what is now disputed. The words of the creation account: “male and female he created them” (*Gen 1:27*) no longer apply. No, what applies now is this: it was not God who created them male and female – hitherto society did this, now we decide for ourselves. Man and woman as created realities, as the nature of the human being, no longer exist. Man calls his nature into question. From now on he is merely spirit and will. [...] But if there is no pre-ordained duality of man and woman in creation, then neither is the family any longer a reality established by creation. Likewise, the child has lost the place he had occupied hitherto and the dignity pertaining to him. Bernheim shows that now, perforce, from being a subject of rights, the child has become an object to which people have a right and which they have a right to obtain. When the freedom to be creative becomes the freedom to create oneself, then necessarily the Maker himself is denied and ultimately man too is stripped of his dignity as a creature of God, as the image of God at the core of his being. The defence of the family is about man himself. And

it becomes clear that when God is denied, human dignity also disappears. Whoever defends God is defending man<sup>38</sup>.

As can be seen, the topics exposed by the Pope reflect those discussed up to this point.

In general, it can therefore be observed that the homosexual or the transsexual, showing that the system of cultural classifications under examination is incapable of understanding the whole reality, risks highlighting its partiality and artificiality, therefore reducing its importance in contemporary society. But the artificiality of the symbolic system is not conceivable from such a realistic point of view as that which seems to underlie the positions analysed, nor can it be recognized as partial, when it is defined as a perfect reflection of the ontological nature of man. It therefore derives that, not being able to be wrong or imperfect, what is wrong and imperfect can only be reality itself. Pope Francis, for example, with perfect theological coherence, defines gender theory as a “mistake of the human mind”<sup>39</sup>. In this situation the mechanisms identified by Berger and Luckmann appear strategies useful for protecting the symbolic order which is threatened in its sacred foundations by the spread of deviance.

In this study, of course, it cannot be said that the order of the world *tout court* is really threatened or not. What can be noted, however, is that the specific world order described, very different from the one maintained by its adversaries, is perceived as under attack. This also appears true looking at the form of the “liturgy” of the Sentinels, which seems to evoke the nostalgia for order, an order where everything seems classifiable in a “certain square on the chessboard”, an order that seems to be represented and reconstructed through the scenography created in the public space:

My new travelling companions and I arrange ourselves slightly clumsily:  
we try to take on that precise arrangement in space that has been  
defined “almost a liturgy”. Because the orderly chessboard arrangement  
aims to be an answer to the chaos, our silence a contralto to the din

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<sup>38</sup> Speech by the Holy Father Benedict XVI, Sala Clementina, Friday, 21 December 2012.

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20121221\\_auguri-curia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121221_auguri-curia.html). Last consulted: 04/07/2015.

<sup>39</sup> Meeting with young people on Lungo mare Caracciolo, speech by the Holy Father, Naples, 21 march 2015.

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2015/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150321\\_napoli-pompei-giovani.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2015/march/documents/papa-francesco_20150321_napoli-pompei-giovani.html). Last consulted: 04/07/2015.

that surrounds us, the concentration in reading an answer to the lack of cultural in-depth study which underlies the project of transformation of reality we opposes.

Reality however is a little different from the idea and so the ranks of my new “friends” first seems to me a bit awkward, skewed and also meagre but then gradually it is fleshed out by new presences and takes on an order, a physiognomy and a beauty, because each of us discovers their place, becomes a “certain” square on the chessboard. I watch them fondly and tenderly: their presence comforts me, I feel I belong to this “people”, most of them strangers. I feel welcomed, supported, protected. (“Standing Sentinels; wounds become openings”, letter, 3 December 2014).

#### *Notes on the aesthetic of the protest*

Communication by the Sentinels is strongly based on the aesthetic form of their protest. It takes place in silence and with their heads bowed over a book. The type of book is indifferent: for the purposes of the protest it does not matter at all what they are reading, appearing holding a book is more important; its meaning is in its form.

Recent studies have highlighted the particular symbolic value of a book, which is an object still enveloped by an aura of sacral respect (Pozzi, 2011; Righetti, 2013). Not only the books of which we are particularly fond are full of meanings that make them inalienable, but the whole category of books is socially protected by taboos. They symbolize, in the first place, knowledge. Therefore power, which for the Standing Sentinels desecrates the truth imposing the “pensée unique”, is symbolically exorcised through the book. In addition, being absorbed by reading expresses the impenetrability of the injustices of the outside world and therefore well represents the unwillingness to negotiate sacred principles.

The tempo of the protest evokes that of reflection opposed to the speed of the modern world and the orderly arrangement of the bodies in a chessboard formation, as already stated, seems to express the sacred order opposed to chaos.

The aesthetic of the protest is therefore structured on binary oppositions: silence vs. noise, book vs. mass media, tempo vs. speed, the public square vs. media circus. The culture of the Standing Sentinels, as has been shown, is also based on clear binary oppositions and the resulting overall structure, orderly and well differentiated, is opposed, in the last place, to chaos; that of the postmodern technological world, in which the frontiers between the traditional dichotomies are blurred.

It is not possible to develop these aspects further, but the aesthetic dimension of the new forms of protest may represent a stimulating field for new research.

### **Conclusions**

Although the existence of a plurality of forms of the family is a real fact (see for example Di Nicola, 2008), and although their requests for recognition today are being heard by various political interlocutors in different countries in the world, their legitimization in the Italian context seems hindered by the social forces that intend to preserve the traditional family. These forces can apparently count not only on the most committed Catholic faithful but also on a background of values diffused in Italy by the Church, understood as an agency of socialization (Cipriani, 1986, 1988, 2003). As opposition to homosexual families seems to be founded on sacred values, by definition “non-negotiable”, no mediation seems possible, although there exist, in theory, some rhetorical lines which could be capable of bypassing the sacred enclosure of values (Tetlock, 2003). As a change of the sacred principles from which the opposition to the laws aimed at recognizing rights for homosexual couples appears unlikely, it seems inevitable that a conflict will be sparked off, destined to be as strong as the political actions that will try to assert these rights. The force of the political action will be proportional to the perceived profanation of the sacred enclosure of the family which in turn will lead to defensive answers that are just as strong.

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