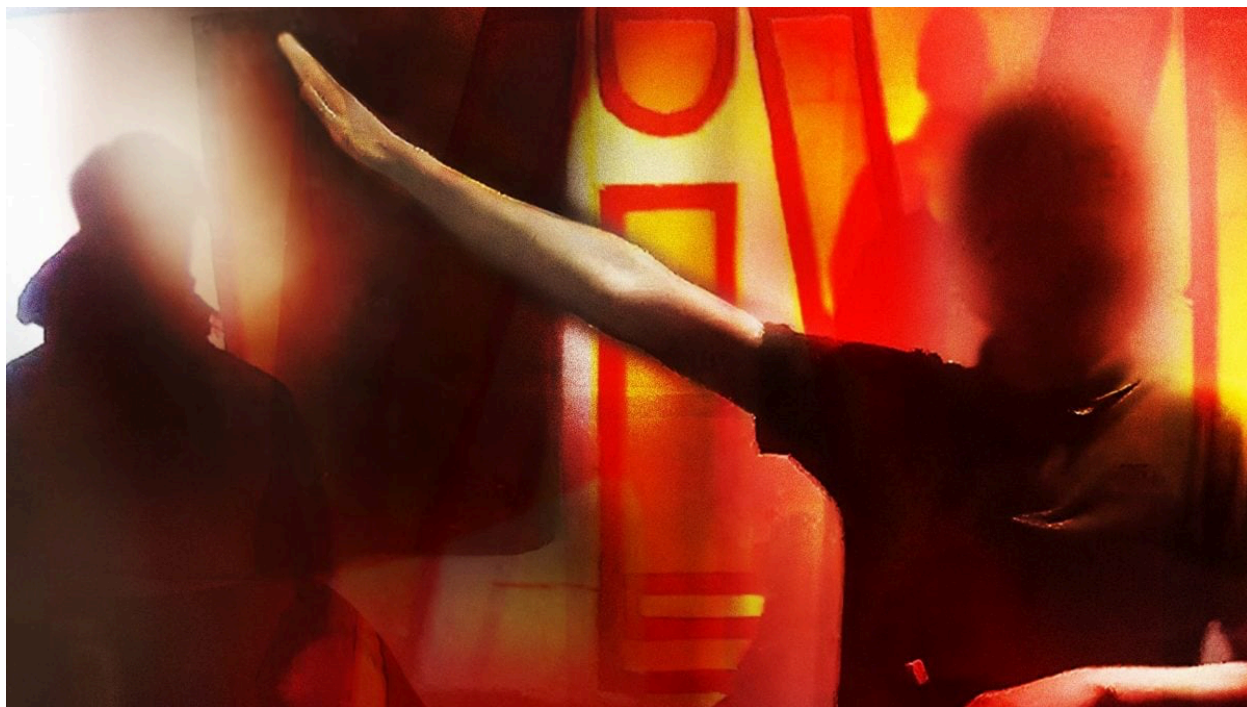


Roman salutes, hymns to the Duce and “Sieg Heil”: Inside The Meloni’s Youth



In their chants they are “the best youth,” at institutional events they are Giorgia Meloni’s “wonderful kids,” and for everyone they are “the soul and the engine” needed to make Brothers of Italy win. But when they step down from the stages of the Atreju festival or from the election campaign, holed up in party headquarters, they talk about fascist graffiti, attend far-right concerts with raised arms, lament the actions of neo-fascist terrorists, shout “Duce!” and “Sieg Heil!”, and sing “boia chi molla,” identifying as “legionaries,” “Blackshirts,” and “comrades, not poor idiots.” These are the activists of *Gioventù Nazionale*, the youth movement of Brothers of Italy, the pride of the party’s entire leadership.

In “*The Meloni’s Youth*”, the undercover video investigation carried out by Backstair, the investigative unit of Fanpage.it, we show how the young activists of the Prime Minister’s party give vent to the party’s dark soul, while the movement’s leaders participate in or condone these behaviors. With one of our reporters, we infiltrated the ranks of *Gioventù Nazionale* and documented the stories, relationships and actions of this group.

The infiltration: from Nazione Futura to Gioventù Nazionale

Pretending to be a young woman with right-wing ideals who had just moved to Rome, the undercover Backstair journalist entered the ranks of *Gioventù Nazionale*. To do so, she began attending the events of *Nazione Futura*, the conservatives' think tank founded by Francesco Giubilei - publisher and former advisor to Culture Minister Gennaro Sangiuliano. It is at *Nazione Futura* conventions that some *Gioventù Nazionale* activists gather: university students who define themselves as conservatives and who publicly present a moderate profile. Inside their circle, however, they boast of belonging to the “social right,” talk about swastikas, “senators with Celtic crosses,” “comrades who went to Ukraine” to fight, and “deserters who arrived in Poland” whom “we slaughtered.”

At one of these events, an opportunity arises to meet Ferrante De Benedictis - vice president of *Nazione Futura* and city councillor in Turin for Brothers of Italy - and to be invited to contribute to the think tank's magazine. We began collaborating with them, publishing articles and pieces aimed at delegitimizing the opposition to the Meloni government. Thanks to the credentials obtained through *Nazione Futura*, the doors open to the most important Brothers of Italy events, starting with Atreju, the youth-right festival born with Giorgia Meloni and grown alongside the party leader. During the day the activists handle security duties, but in between conferences they let loose: “I've been doing politics since I was 14; with FdI I started in my first year at university, but before that I was with CasaPound,” one youth movement member says. “My grandfather was a big fascist,” a militant confessed. “When I was born he gave me a black silk layette—I grew up like that.”

“The best youth” ready to become the ruling class

It's Saturday, June 1, and as Brothers of Italy voters gather in Piazza del Popolo awaiting the start of Giorgia Meloni's European election rally, from the Pincio terrace, amid chants and tricolor smoke, the *Gioventù Nazionale* youths descend: “We are Italy's best youth, we are Gioventù Nazionale and forever we will sing,” they chant while waving flags.

Founded in 2014, the youth wing of Brothers of Italy now boasts thousands of members, claiming to be the largest youth political movement in Italy. Its emblem is a hand holding a wind-blown tricolor flag - an evolution of the hand holding the flame, symbol of the *Fronte della Gioventù*, whose historical and spiritual heir it is.

What has changed is the role the organization now plays alongside the governing party. Last December, speaking at Atreju, Giorgia Meloni thanked the young members of her party: “This is something many envy us for - that there are young people who still believe in politics, in activism. It's rare, it's precious.” In recent years, the youth movement has grown exponentially:

“Today we provide quality leadership in every territory,” said Fabio Roscani, president of the movement and FdI MP, addressing activists at the Pescara convention.

By attending these events disguised as activists, one realizes the value *Gioventù Nazionale* provides to the party. The youths are on the front lines of all demonstrations, working closely with leaders like Giovanni Donzelli, who in Pescara consults with them to finalize preparations.

Andrea Piepoli and Flaminia Pace: who they are



At *Atreju* we meet Piermarco Silvestroni, son of Senator Marco Silvestroni, a long-time party figure. He proposes a meeting with Andrea Piepoli, national leader of the youth movement: “He’s close to national president Fabio Roscani and theoretically he’ll be the next national president. He coordinates many dynamics both nationally and in Rome. He’ll get you into one of the groups that report to him in the Rome area.”

Through Piepoli and Silvestroni, we are introduced to Flaminia Pace, the prodigy of Roman politics and a strong contender for the upcoming city elections. In 2021, at 18, after *Fanpage.it*’s *Lobby Nera* investigation and the Forza Nuova attack on the CGIL union, she wrote a letter to President Sergio Mattarella and then-Prime Minister Mario Draghi asking them to “limit the media lynching” of Brothers of Italy, claiming neither the party nor its activists had anything to do with fascism: “I cannot accept being constantly labeled, mocked and humiliated by newspapers, TV shows and intellectuals - being called a dangerous nostalgic of Fascism just because I’m part of a political party, just because I’m a Patriot, just because I believe in values different from the mainstream narrative.”

Yet when speaking to members of her local chapter, Pace says she wants to vote “three times Duce” in the European elections, insults “black people,” and authorizes *Gioventù Nazionale* activists to write “*boia chi molla*” to cover anti-fascist graffiti. With her activists she even recounts her father’s alleged ties with Francesca Mambro and Valerio Fioravanti, founders of the NAR (Armed Revolutionary Nuclei) - the neo-fascist terrorist group responsible for the Bologna massacre and 33 murders.

Besides her political work at Casa Italia - the FdI club she founded - Pace is also a member of the Commission for European Affairs and Cooperation of the National Youth Council, the advisory body representing youth before institutions, including the Office for Universal Civil Service. It is civil service she discusses when thinking about how to raise funds for her chapter: “Next year we’ll have another stream of income from civil service. The money comes from the state; each young volunteer gets 500 euros a month. What do we have to do to run civil service? Nothing. Of the 500 euros, a nice offering is appreciated.”

At a youth chapter event in the Pinciano district, Arianna Meloni - Prime Minister Meloni’s sister and political secretary of FdI - also appears: “Thank you to all our activists, to all our youth. This is who we are - this chapter is an example of what our party is.” Her presence is not merely symbolic, as Pace explains: “Arianna told us that we can build something big here, and if she said it, it means we can become a reference point.”

The Present Day and the desire to “charge” opponents



For weeks we take part in the community's life, and under the chapter leader's guidance we witness the training of newcomers. The members include dozens of high-school and university students united by strong political views, often unmentionable: they insult homosexuals ("My teacher is gay and lives with a man." "Disgusting, switch classes") and make racist comments ("Black looks good on everything, except skin"). Then, late at night, when they meet to cover the city with extremist posters and stickers, they move like a team: at least two lookouts are needed to watch for police and sound the alarm, while the others, wearing gloves and hoods, paste the banners.

One of the most important rites in right-wing culture is the "*Present Day*". To preserve its solemnity, Pace instructs activists to maintain military discipline: "It's a very serious moment. We'll be lined up in five rows of five. You start in the rest position, the military one. When you see me doing this movement (hand over heart), you stand at attention, with your fist over your heart."

During these identity rituals, leaders become especially vigilant, especially when cameras are present, as they worry activists might slip into Roman salutes. For this reason, at the "*Present Day*" for Paolo Di Nella - a *Fronte della Gioventù* activist killed in a political attack in 1983 - youths from Brothers of Italy are forbidden to answer journalists' questions, and when reporters approach during the vigil, leader Andrea Piepoli blocks them.

A governing party, in short, asks its youth to show a more moderate face at institutional events. But these directives do not always restrain them, to the point where leaders themselves encourage or share such expressions. This happens in Piazza del Popolo, Rome, when Andrea Piepoli repeatedly greets his peers with the gladiatorial handshake before Giorgia Meloni arrives to close the European election campaign.

Among the least popular recommendations is not responding with violence. When the shutter of the *Gioventù Nazionale* headquarters in Prenestino-Centocelle is vandalized, leaders organize a "Festival Against Political Hatred," attended by several MPs. Outside, however, the youths express frustration: "What we need here is a good truncheon," says one. "The problem is we can't charge them anymore; once we could, now it's a problem," replies another. "No one calls us fascist bastards anymore - they just look," adds a third.



Roman salutes and identitarian music at Colle Oppio

On the sidelines of Atreju events, young Brothers of Italy activists arrange to meet at Colle Oppio - the section where the party's current leadership was formed, now Fabio Rampelli's office, mentor of Giorgia Meloni and leader of the party's most identitarian faction. "We considered Colle Oppio our home; we mobilized to clean the park every year. We were a light in the night," Meloni writes in her autobiography *I Am Giorgia*.

The gathering is secret, but thanks to an invitation from Patrizio Silvestroni - another son of Senator Marco Silvestroni—the Fanpage journalist attends and witnesses what happens inside. The significance of the event is clear even before entering: "No photos or videos inside," one organizer warns, "because Aurora is playing and they're not supposed to."

Aurora, a band formed by former *Azione Giovani* militants, is among the reference groups of identitarian rock, the far-right music scene. Their songs are filled with references to the post-fascist subculture, such as *Centuria alata*, which celebrates being Italian thanks to "Marshal Balbo" who "guided us toward Tomorrow." They are also known for dedicating a 1998 song to the current prime minister: "Little ancient roughneck in a child's body." The band has close ties to Brothers of Italy: drummer Federico Bonesi was an advisor to Meloni when she was Youth Minister and helped organize party events like Piazza Italia; singer-guitarist Raffaele Persichetti ran Atreju's social media and was webmaster for then - Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida and Abruzzo governor Marco Marsilio.

He also worked for *Meeting Point*, the London-based company created by Roberto Fiore, founder of the far-right terrorist group *Terza Posizione* and later Forza Nuova.

What journalists must not see at Colle Oppio is the exaltation of those who, still wearing volunteer T-shirts from Atreju, salute the past with Roman salutes and identitarian chants.

Aurora's music accompanies activists everywhere: in cars, at community camps, and in party headquarters. In one such location, during the inauguration of "Casa Italia" - the chapter where the journalist infiltrated - another Aurora concert takes place. It's May 10. National Youth president Fabio Roscani, elected to Parliament in 2022, ends his speech, thanks the Pinciano activists, and then steps outside to continue talking with provincial representatives. MPs Marco Perissa and Paolo Trancassini also leave, but not before bidding farewell with the gladiatorial salute. Once the doors close - with undercover police still stationed outside - the Aurora band sets up. When the concert begins, with party figures present, the youths shout "Duce!" and perform Roman salutes.

"Cabiria lives and in her lives her fire": the community camp



One of the formative experiences for Brothers of Italy activists is the community camp, a moment when, far from the constraints imposed on a governing party, the youths can strengthen their sense of belonging. Our task during the three-day retreat in Rieti is to photograph key moments. "Piepoli wants a photo of the line of people climbing, like the Fellowship of the Ring," says an activist who works in the office of an FdI MP. The reference is to the Hobbits, whose imagery the right has adopted over the years.

The community camp is called “Cabiria,” a name coined by Gabriele D’Annunzio meaning “born of fire.” During the camp, chapter leaders urge the activists, emphasizing the importance of the role they play in the party’s future: “Without us, many things wouldn’t be possible,” Piepoli reminds them. “We are the gears needed to make the machine work and win.”

But when night falls, the group of activists and their leaders gather around a bonfire and sing songs from the Fascist era in which they call themselves “fascists,” “Blackshirts,” “Mussolini’s comrades,” shouting “Duce!” and “Sieg Heil!” at the top of their lungs - without fear of causing embarrassment, because once back in Rome, they will continue restraining their true nature.

LINK:<https://www.fanpage.it/politica/saluti-romani-inni-al-duce-e-sieg-heil-dentro-gioventu-nazionale-il-movimento-giovanile-di-fratelli-ditalia/>