The Limits of State Sovereignty: An Exploration of Sardinian Minority Nationalism

By

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Abstract:

The concept of sovereignty has been at the heart of discussions in the discipline of International Relations (IR) over the past 30 years, giving way to much-needed interrogations of the exclusionary implications of realist treatments of the term as bound to the territoriality and rationality of unified states. Overlooked in this critical literature, however, have been minority nationalist articulations of sovereignty that do not conform to the neat categorizations of inter/intra-state politics characteristic of realist imaginations of sovereign power. Responding to this lacuna in IR scholarship, this thesis examines the role and significance of sovereignty in Sardinian minority nationalist discourse. Through an analysis of ethnographic fieldnotes and 37 semi-structured interviews with ‘independentists’ conducted in Sardinia between 2017 and 2018, the research draws attention to how the term’s definition constitutes a complex site of political contestation for minority nationalists. Drawing from a Gramscian perspective that emphasises the importance of adopting a relational approach to the study of political discourses as dialectically constructed, the research investigates how activists treated sovereignty as a way of doing politics. Activists used the term in varying ways to contest conditions of economic exploitation and political and cultural marginalization shaped by the unevenness of Italian governance and capitalist development as well as to formulate alternative ‘myths’ of political belonging and credibility. Arguing for an approach that considers sovereignty as shaped by the ongoing effects of political dynamics of ‘revolution/restoration’, the research contributes to ongoing efforts to produce non-essentializing depictions of people’s engagement with sovereignty whilst not losing sight of the structuring effects of social relations of production on perceptions of collective belonging, political legitimacy and the very possibilities of political manoeuvre.

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‘Each man, […] carries on some form of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is to bring into being new modes of thought’ (Gramsci 1971: 9).

Table of Abbreviations:

AF	A Foras
AmpsI	A Manca pro S'Indipendentzia
CiU	Convergència i Unió
CN	Caminera Noa
CSS	Confederazione Sindacale Sarda
DC	Christian Democracy
ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
EU	European Union
FIU	Fronte Indipendentista Unidu
IPE	International Political Economy
IR	International Relations
IRS	Indipendèntzia Repùbrica de Sardigna
LibeRU	Lìberos Rispetados Uguales
MZF	Movimento Zona Franca
PA	Progetto Autodeterminatzione
PCI	Italian Communist Party
PD	Democratic Party
PdS	Partito dei Sardi
ProgRES	Progetu Repùblica de Sardigna
PSd'Az	Partito Sardo d'Azione
RM	Red Moors
SD	Sa Domu
SL	Sardegna Libera
SNI	Sardigna Natzione Indipendentzia
SNP	Scottish National Party

Part One

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the days and weeks running up to the Catalan referendum on the 1st October 2017, activity amongst Sardinian 'independentists' was frenzied. High profile activists organized a delegation of international 'observers' to go to Barcelona to oversee the vote and eagerly reported their impressions and solidarity with the Catalan people in regional papers and social media sites. Members of different independentist parties arranged sit-ins outside the offices of the Spanish Consulate in Sardinia's capital, Cagliari, to protest Madrid's refusal to grant the referendum. Such condemnation extended to the Sardinian Regional Council which publicly expressed solidarity with Catalonia, supporting its 'right to express self-determination' (PSdAz 2017) and criticized Spanish government opposition prior to the referendum. When the Catalan government eventually declared independence some weeks later, activists widely celebrated the news. In a signed letter shared online, 150 town councillors from 11 independentist parties[1] declared their support for a Catalan republic, stating:

> 'The people of Catalonia has expressed itself with clarity and dignity through a referendum for self-determination […] A new republic is born which we know is peaceful and a friend of all […] History often surprises us, showing us that the incredible can occur: over the past few days this has once again happened. As a lesson for Sardinians and every people on the European continent, today and tomorrow, good and freedom are always within reach of conscious and determined peoples, good and freedom are always at our door' (ProgRES 2017).

It was a historic moment, a symbol for the potential of their own struggle for Sardinian national independence. Meanwhile, the Spanish government's suppression of the vote and subsequent imprisonment of key Catalan officials as well as the EU's perceived tepid response to the referendum, quickly produced uproar. Videos entitled 'Help Catalonia, Save Europe' that depicted scenes of police raids in Barcelona and called Europe to help Catalonia were widely shared. Yellow ribbons were worn in public displays of solidarity for months after the vote. Impassioned speeches in support of the Catalan government were made and rapturously applauded. There was a strong sense of identification with the Catalan struggle, of being in it together, of a fight for self-determination and sovereignty, for the equal treatment and recognition of all of Europe's stateless nations.

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[1] Fronte Indipendetista Unidu (FIU), Indipendèntzia Repùbrica de Sardigna (IRS), Liberu, Partito dei Sardi (PdS), Partito Sardo d'Azione (PSd'Az), Progetu Repùblica de Sardigna (ProgRES), Rossomori (RM), Sardegna Possibile (SP), Sardigna Natzione Indipendentzia (SNI), Sardigna Libera (SL) e SARDOS.

The past fifty years have seen both a rise and persistence of minority nationalist mobilization across Western Europe[2]. At the forefront of many of these movements has been the attainment of sovereignty, seen recently in Catalonia with the Catalan Parliament's approval of the 'Declaration of sovereignty and the right to self-determination by the people of Catalonia' (ACN 2013), in Scotland where the Scottish National Party (SNP) has increasingly made proclamations in favour of Scottish people's right to sovereignty following the Brexit vote (The Herald 2016), and in Sardinia where the acquisition of sovereignty is seen by some as providing the opportunity to: 'enlarge our horizon and traverse new paths, by rejecting the idea of our subalternity' (ProgRES n.d.). Studies that have examined the endurance of these movements have identified a number of contributing factors. European integration has provided access to 'transnational' and 'regional' platforms for increased autonomy and stability beyond existing states, whilst growing opposition to increased atomization and alienation as a result of globalization and neoliberalism have intensified desires for cultural recognition and democratization (see Keating & McGarry 2001 and Guibernau 1999 for some still highly influential interventions). In sum, minority nationalisms have proven to be extremely adaptable, responding to changes in the capacities of states and crucially, developing innovative formulations of sovereignty that move beyond state-centric imaginaries of political power, identity and legitimacy, favouring notions of sovereignty as 'graduated' and non-absolutist (Walker 2018). They challenge the view that nationalism is primarily concerned with the attainment of statehood and clear-cut national boundaries, showing that nationalists often conceptualize economic and political power as shifting and myriad (Guibernau 1999) and 'national identity' as 'plural rather than singular and exclusive' (Keating 1998: 218; Lluch 2014).

Despite these apparent innovations, minority nationalisms and their conceptualizations of sovereignty continue to be underexamined in the discipline of International Relations (IR) where the notion of sovereignty has played a foundational role in theories of the modern state and inter-state system and where its definition has occupied centre-stage in discussions about the scope and nature of world politics and scholarship[3]. Sovereignty long denoted the state's indivisibility and rationality as the central decision-making entity in accounts of international politics, marking the state's territorial boundaries and legitimacy. This reading, however, has increasingly been questioned following the emergence of critical approaches that called for greater sensitivity towards the complexity of political power, culture, recognition and subjectivity shaping world politics. The expansion of transnational corporations and organizations, changes in telecommunications, faster and increased mobility of capital and labour that emerged with the arrival of a new age of globalization posed questions for the notion of the unified sovereign state and its capacity to function autonomously (Camilleri & Falk 1992; Sassen 1996). Whilst alternative constructivist, feminist, post-structural, historical materialist, post-colonial formulations indicated that there is much at stake in the determination of sovereignty; namely, the exclusion and reification of particular ways of seeing, thinking, being, uncaptured when legitimate and de facto power is regarded as being wielded by rational state forces. Sovereignty, according to many of these accounts, has always symbolized a more insidious ideal, playing an important part in the establishment of normative hierarchies of agency, participation and governmentality; sovereignty as a classifier of who is in and who is out, Same and Other (see the following example Agnew 1994 & 2017; Ashley 1988; Ashley & Walker 1990; Bartelson 1995 & 2014; Biersteker & Weber 1996; Grovogui 1996 & 2002; Walker 1993; 2006b & 2010; Weber 1994 & 2016). These emerging accounts show how sovereignty as previously framed was ahistorical, static, and obscured the active ways in which IR scholarship itself contributed to atomizing, racializing, and gendering political subjectivity and struggle.

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[2] Other notable examples include Wales, the Basque Country, Corsica, Brittany, Flanders, Lombardy, and the Faroe Islands.

[3] See chapter 2 for an in-depth overview of these debates.

Nationalist and in particular minority nationalist articulations of sovereignty currently seen in places like Sardinia and Catalonia, however, have been largely absent in these debates, symptomatic of wider failures within the discipline to seriously engage with nationalism. As Jaakko Heiskanen shows, nationalism has been rendered a ‘spectra’ within IR (Heiskanen 2019: 315), its importance often implied but rarely expanded upon, reduced to either a synonym for the state, seen most notably in the use of national to describe state practice or an external threat to international political ordering as theoretically passé, a relic of an old and redundant past tied to exclusionary discourses of modern subjectivity which we need to overcome. Such omissions are problematic, minimizing nationalism’s continued appeal as seen in the recent resurgence of minority nationalist mobilization and prolonging theoretical thinness around nationalism that flattens the disputed nature of the nation-state. Moreover, they obscure if not silence the claims made by political forces in places like Catalonia, Scotland and Sardinia, who see in the national question an emancipatory means for the formation of alternative political configurations and who problematize conventional notions of state-centrism and sovereignty, rendering these actors inanimate, unthinking, and naïve. By continuing to overlook nationalism’s significance, we perpetuate the view that nations, national identity and nationalist mobilization do not matter, hiding the novel articulations of sovereignty and nationalism currently gaining traction.

1.1 Research Aims

The following study responds to this lacuna in research through an examination of Sardinian ‘independentist’ demands and conceptualizations of sovereignty. The primary aim is to provide a detailed analysis of the varied ways in which activists define and use the term and the extent to which they problematize conventional readings of sovereignty. As movements explicitly grappling with questions surrounding the realizability of sovereignty and the sovereign state form, the study seeks to draw attention to the ways in which minority nationalisms and nationalisms more generally, provide fruitful grounds for interrogations of sovereignty and its continued relevance in contemporary world politics. In order to address these aims, the study responds to the following research questions:

1. How do Sardinian independentists define and use sovereignty?
2. What significance do Sardinian independentists attach to sovereignty within their claims for national self-determination?
3. What do their accounts of sovereignty tell us about the conditions shaping minority nationalist mobilization today?

The thesis draws from the work of Marxist and Sardinian, Antonio Gramsci, whose extensive writings provide us with useful conceptual and methodological framings that enable the development of an approach to the study of activist accounts that a) does not essentialize nor reduce the significance of sovereignty amongst Sardinian nationalists, and b) which takes nationalism seriously as a fundamental feature of international politics. Gramsci’s analyses of Sardinia and Italy also provide us with a useful historical account through which we can examine the emergence and development of the Sardinian national question which will be crucial in appreciating some of the reasons activists attributed to their struggles for Sardinian sovereignty. The thesis combines this approach with ethnographic methods in order to account for the contextual factors shaping independentist claims and to prioritize the views of activists themselves.

1.2 Research Contributions and Findings

The research shows that far from functioning simply as receptors of international and statist norms, minority nationalisms constitute dynamic and heterogeneous movements that produce highly nuanced approaches to sovereignty. By directly posing the issue of sovereignty’s limits and the question of how we become sovereign of our destinies, minority nationalisms explicitly interrogate the lines of where legitimate politics should and can take place. They emphasize the highly contentious nature of the binaries seen to underpin categories of 'national', 'international', 'state' and 'sovereign', 'economic' and 'political' and highlight the situatedness of sovereignty as a relational process. As such, they present optimal cases for investigating the continued relevance of sovereignty, its constructed nature as a means through which social forces both appeal to existing norms of participation and recognition and/or produce alternative narratives and forms of collective belonging.

Through the analysis of 37 semi-structured interviews and fieldnotes drawn from research conducted in Sardinia between 2017 and 2018, the thesis makes three central claims. Firstly, that independentists largely regarded sovereignty not as a static ideal or principle but a way of *doing* politics and of approaching the struggle for Sardinian national self-determination. Activist accounts often went against formulations of the term that simply treated it as a signifier of state boundedness and decision-making and referred to particular ways of pursuing Sardinian national independence and self-determination which went beyond ideals of territorial ordering and non-interference. In keeping with developments made in scholarship on minority nationalist approaches to sovereignty, the research finds that activists were far from rigid in their delimitations of what sovereignty entailed, often ascribing to varying interpretations of the term, challenging binary either/or conceptualizations of sovereignty characteristic of realist formulations.

Secondly, the analysis shows that independentists actively contested and problematized sovereignty. The term's signification and association with particular ways of doing nationalist politics reflected struggles around the basis and direction of the movement. For some, sovereignty represented what in Gramscian terms can be described as an exercise in myth-making as a means through which activists pursued political approaches capable of contesting conditions of economic, political and cultural marginalization, as well as create alternative myths of political belonging through which a Sardinian national will could be expressed. For others, sovereignty entailed a more conservative approach and the adoption of reformative and in some cases restorative political strategies tied to the failed myths of the Italian state.

Thirdly, the analysis shows that sovereignty was also indicative of a widespread sense of being 'caught between systems'. Activists were widely concerned with the possible horizons of political manoeuvre and the development of strategies that could respond to an amalgamation of political and economic forces shaping the Sardinian struggle. These could not be easily categorized as being national, statist or international in nature but rather reflected a common narrative surrounding the basis of Sardinia's marginalization, namely, the ongoing legacies of the uneven nature of Italian unification and its failure to respond to long-standing class inequalities. The widespread desire for credibility and the development of approaches focused on 'situated ruptures' shows that activists felt bound to appealing to existing conditions of possible manoeuvre and crucially, a dialectical understanding of sovereignty as relationally formulated in particular historical circumstances. Sovereignty, whilst by no means fixed in its signification, reflected a partiality both in terms of who was using it and in terms of activists' situation within particular political and economic conditions.

The research contributes to appreciating the extent to which sovereignty does not merely represent an exercise in discursive selection but needs to be examined within the context of the material conditions in which it is conceptualized. Sovereignty, understood as a form of doing, constitutes a productive activity through which activists establish 'viable' or 'credible' political praxes and wage struggles with the current order of things. In Sardinia, activists tied sovereignty's use and definition to the *social relations of production* shaping mobilization i.e. 'the totality of social relations in material, institutional, and discursive forms that engender particular social forces' (Morton 2007a: 114). Their accounts show that the pursuit of sovereignty cannot be divorced from an appreciation of Sardinia's economic, political and cultural marginalization and tensions within modern distributions of power between desires for collective recognition and self-determination and the already existing and highly exclusionary machinations of world politics and the capitalist state. Sovereignty in this sense is not just an abstraction, a simple reification as often suggested in critical IR scholarship but felt in the concrete exchanges of people's daily lives.

The research also contributes to literatures on European minority nationalist mobilization where struggles for the definition of the term within movements is still lacking (Dalle Mulle & Serrano 2019; Lluch 2014). It also brings the issue of class back into the fore, something which has been largely underplayed in existing comparative literatures on European minority nationalist claims. Whilst we cannot simply attribute nationalist discourse to class struggle, in cases such as Sardinia the issue of class, economic inequality and exploitation has been a central motivating factor behind demands for national sovereignty. Moreover, activist discussions of sovereignty evinced conceptualizations of power that were intimately interconnected with a concern with economic power, production and self-determination. Sovereignty and the nation were inextricably tied to a world context of political ordering predicated on capitalist accumulation.

Before moving onto an engagement with the research at hand a few clarifications are necessary.

1.3 Defining Nationalism

Defining nationalism has been at the heart of debates within nationalism studies where the ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘why’ and ‘how’’ of nations have been subject to intense speculation (Ichijo & Uzelac 2005: 1) creating splits between those who regard the nation a modern construct that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries and those who regard it as a natural entity long rooted in human history (see Smith 1998 for an important overview of these early debates). Central to the problem of defining the nation and nationalism has been their highly varied nature which cannot be easily categorized into an overarching definition or typology (Hobsbawm 2013: 5). As Eric Hobsbawm notes, exceptions can always be found in definitions that posit ‘language, ethnicity or a combination of criteria such as language, common territory, common history, cultural traits or whatever else’ as key features (Hobsbawm 2013: 5).

This study does not aim to resolve these tensions nor the question of whether or not Sardinia actually constitutes a nation. An attempt to do so would detract from the objective of the study, namely, to draw attention to the complexities of Sardinian nationalist claims to sovereignty. The positing of strict criteria whilst helpful in specifying phenomena invariably limits what we might deem Sardinian nationalism and runs the risk of passing normative judgement on the rightness or wrongness of activist claims (Lluch 2014). Instead, I take a broad view towards nationalism and draw from John Breuilly and Anthony Smith’s combined and loose definition of nationalism as a ‘form of politics’ that seeks to ‘attain’ or ‘maintain’ the ‘unity and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential “nation”’ (Breuilly 2005: 17). Such a framing allows us to specify the particularity of the nation and national recognition within minority nationalist claims, whilst avoiding the prescription of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, political and economic specifications which are hard to generalize across cases. Crucially, it also acknowledges their political nature, as active expressions of attempts to shape, preserve, contest political relations and ‘constellations of power’ (Keating 1996: 53). This is crucial in the development of an account that avoids reifying nationalisms as static entities, helping us to denaturalize nations as given features of contemporary politics, and allowing us to capture nationalism’s continued significance in places such as Sardinia where it reflects complex attempts to ‘come to terms’ with existing political relations (Keating 1996: 53). I use the term minority in line with Michael Keating, to reflect a second particularity of the cases here discussed, namely, their subordinate status within existing states and crucially, their 'statelessness' (Keating 1996).

The focus of this research is less on developing specific definitions and more on adopting an approach that draws attention to the relational situation of minority nationalist claims and to a) give credence to the varied demands made by nationalists as well as b) capture the breadth of objectives shaping minority nationalist imaginaries and aims. In keeping with other research that has drawn attention to the ways in which minority nationalisms problematize conventional delineations of nation, state and sovereignty (Keating 1996, 2001, Lluch 2014), this study thus places greater attention to its historical situation and the ways in which self-proclaimed activists understand the terms in question. Such an approach makes room for what Keating notes, namely, that: 'nationalist claims […] are made in relation to a particular state form and balance of political and social forces and face a particular array of opportunities and barriers in each case' (Keating 1998: 20). Moreover, it proves useful in the case of Sardinia where activists were nationalist in so far as they sought to attain or maintain the unity and identity of a Sardinian nation, but not so on the grounds of their self-identification. The majority of the participants of this study defined themselves as independentist despite their commitment to Sardinian nationhood. The reasons for this are less to do with a rejection of the category of the nation and more to do with the particular historical significance of the notion of independence in Sardinia which grew in response to a growing desire to move away from the label of autonomist which had dominated the pursuit of Sardinian national recognition in the movement's inception (Chapter 4 discusses this shift further). The majority of the activists here discussed believed in the existence of a Sardinian nation and national identity.

1.4 Why Sardinia?

Given the successes of other minority nationalist movements, the question arises, why Sardinia? Indeed, the presence of a Sardinian nationalist movement may come as a surprise given Sardinia's lack of notoriety in literatures on minority nationalisms (Hepburn 2009b). However, there are several reasons as to why a turn to Sardinia is useful for the study at hand. Firstly, Sardinia has long been overlooked on account of a lack of sustained electoral success compared to cases such as Catalonia, Scotland and Northern Italy (Hepburn 2009b). However, whilst a useful indicator of the popularity of minority nationalist actors, electoral success should not be the only barometer for the selection of the cases we study, particularly in places such as Sardinia where it fails to account for widespread feelings of Sardinian national identity across the population and where there is still extensive mobilization around the national question. The strong sense of Sardinian national identity is hard to miss, Sardinian flags are commonplace across towns, the Sardinianness of produce and well-known crystalline beaches are a recurring trope in tourism campaigns, and regional political discourse has long evoked Sardinia's cultural, political and historical distinctiveness. Despite the 'highs and lows' (Hepburn 2009b) experienced by the movement in Sardinia, it still nevertheless remains host to one of Italy's longest-standing nationalist movements, witness to, and example of the rise and persistence over the past century of sub-state nationalist mobilization in Western Europe. The pursuit of greater political and economic autonomy as well as Sardinian national recognition has at various points over the past century dominated political debate on the island and does not look likely to disappear any time soon following the success of the Partito Sardo D'Azione (PSd'Az) in recent elections[4]. An examination of the movement would provide up-to-date and in depth ethnographic and interview material which is virtually non-existent in existing minority nationalist scholarship[5].

Secondly, and perhaps more pertinently, sovereignty over recent years has acquired increased prominence in Sardinia where it had historically remained at the margins of terminological discussions despite its regular appearance in party documents and discourse. As noted by Carlo Pala (2016), we have seen a notable rise in interest in the term over the past decade amongst Sardinian independentists with the emergence of self-defined 'sovereigntist' parties (Pala 2016). The term as I would learn whilst conducting fieldwork, continues to be highly contentious. Some activists would describe sovereignty in ways similar to the state centrist definitions alluded to above, however, there were many who found its vagueness problematic. The contemporary prominence of sovereignty in Sardinian independentist debate as well as its problematization makes the Sardinian case particularly germane to the study at hand providing grounds for an examination of the term's contemporary significance in European minority nationalist discourse and the active and nuanced ways in which minority nationalists use the term.

Thirdly, like much research, my own personal proximity to the island made it particularly suited to the study at hand. Having lived there for a year, I had maintained valuable contact with Sardinian activists who could facilitate access to others within the movement as well as the necessary language skills to conduct in depth interviews and extended fieldwork in the area.

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[4] The PSd'Az alongside the far-right Northern League (LN) won 47.8% of the vote in the last general election. The PSd'Az leader Christian Solinas became Regional President.

[5] Some noteworthy exceptions include Clifton & Usai 2019; Demuro, Mola & Ruggiu 2013; Farinelli 2017; Hepburn 2009b; Pala 2016.

1.5 Why Gramsci?

Better known as leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), martyr of the Italian left, and commentator of culture, hegemony, and the conditions for socialist mobilization, Antonio Gramsci is less remembered as a nationalism scholar. However, his extensive writings mostly produced between 1914 to 1935, are peppered with reflections on the nation, the state, the political and strategic significance of national identity and the role it played in the foundation of Italy. As I aim to show in the course of this study, Gramsci's conceptual formulations and analysis of nationalism and the Italian state provide us with highly appropriate lenses through which we can interpret Sardinian sovereignty demands. Firstly, and in line with critical debates around sovereignty within IR, Gramsci placed a great deal of importance on ideology and language as productive forces as well as signification and meaning-making as a political practice. Such an approach is crucial for the present study, providing an analytical framework that takes the complex and continuous processes of contestation and mediation shaping sovereignty's definition and ongoing relevance seriously as not only representing a static normative or organizational ideal but as a political doing, through which social forces pursue particular objectives and embed political projects. Meaning-making is regarded as a political activity reflecting the partialized nature of sovereignty claims.

Secondly, he placed a great deal of value on affective, social, cultural, quotidian experiences as central contributing factors behind the successes and failures of political projects whilst not losing sight of the structuring influence of social relations of production that limit and condition the kinds of identity claims made. Gramsci's concepts of hegemony, historical bloc, passive revolution, myth, amongst others, posit a dialectical relationship between discursive and ideological formation and material conditions that regards these as mutually defining. Such an approach is crucial in capturing the particularities of activist demands for sovereignty as relationally formed and reflective of engagements with particular constellations of power, but also in drawing attention to the continued significance of nationalism and sovereignty claims in contemporary world politics that are not made in a vacuum. Activist discussions of sovereignty were intimately interconnected with a perceived sense of what critical IR and IPE scholar, Stephen Gill, has described as the 'limits of the possible' (Gill 2008: 13). In the case of Sardinia, sovereignty was inextricably linked to conditions of uneven development, the failures of the Italian state and the contradictions of the nationalist project as a form of contestation within the contours of a global capitalist system. An appreciation of the situatedness of activist claims is thus vital in our ability to understand the significance nationalist activists continued to attach to sovereignty and national self-determination and the driving factors behind their claims.

1.6 Thesis Outline

The thesis is split into two parts. Part 1 provides the theoretical and methodological basis of the study, reviews discussions surrounding the problem of defining sovereignty and current trends shaping minority nationalist formulations. Chapter 2 appraises debates around the concept within IR, starting with an overview of realist definitions that have provided the backdrop to treatments of sovereignty and the emergence of critiques that have questioned the realist common sense. An appreciation of these debates is crucial in determining what the study of minority nationalist sovereignty claims can contribute to the discipline and to ongoing attempts to unpack the concept. The final two sections of the chapter discuss nationalism's continued absence in these debates and argue for a turn to an examination of minority nationalist uses and definitions of sovereignty as a means to begin to respond to nationalism's omission and as important expressions of attempts to come to terms with sovereignty and its limitations in contemporary junctures.

Chapter 3 introduces a Gramscian perspective and shows how his work provides us with useful conceptual lenses through which we can appreciate the political significance of the meanings we attach to the words we use, as well as the political and historical significance of nationalism as an integral feature of the modern state and interstate system. It argues that Gramsci provides us with a relational approach through which we can engage with signification as dialectically tied to material conditions and as a political activity central to the development of myths of collective belonging and political possibility. His analysis of the state is particularly germane to the study of popular sovereignty, capturing its significance within modern states, as well as providing useful insights into historic fractures within Italy that have contributed to the emergence of the Sardinian question. The chapter ends with a discussion of the methods used. It maintains that the adoption of an ethnographic approach facilitates an analysis of activist views and enables an appreciation of politics in movement and sovereignty's ongoing construction in concrete settings of political struggle. Such an approach is crucial in capturing the peculiarities of minority nationalist formulations of sovereignty which are highly responsive to considerations around the strategies they can feasibly adopt and possible avenues of manoeuvre as opposed to stringent perceptions of sovereignty as an ordering ideal. Crucially, it gives voice to the views of activists as central driving forces behind sovereignty's conceptualization, something which is often neglected.

Part 2 focuses on the analysis of the empirical material collected in the field. Chapter 4 begins with an introduction to the Sardinian case and draws from Gramsci's analysis of Italian unification and the Southern Question. The chapter describes Sardinian independentism's roots in a long history of class struggle, uneven development and the failures of Italy and the island's political elites to respond to regional economic, cultural and political fractures inherent within the Italian national project. Using Gramsci's concept of 'passive revolution', the chapter argues that this is a story that is recognized and retold frequently in Sardinian historiography and which has played a central part in activists' own understanding of the roots and aims of the Sardinian national struggle. An appreciation of this story is vital in understanding the origins and basis of Sardinian independentism but as we shall see in the following chapters, was an important underlying thread in activists' treatments of sovereignty. The chapter ends with an overview of more recent debates within the movement and introduces key forces and issues driving current iterations of Sardinian independentism.

Chapter 5 serves as the first strictly empirical chapter and provides an overview of the main definitions of sovereignty encountered in the field. It identifies 4 main approaches to sovereignty: 1) conventional framings that defined sovereignty in realist terms as a signifier of territorial containment, control and non-interference, 2) interpretations that placed emphasis on the need to appeal to international norms of collaboration and where sovereignty represented an expansive approach, 3) approaches that regarded sovereignty as entailing the gradual acquisition of self-determination, and 4) definitions that saw sovereignty as a form of political spin and an approach to Sardinian nationalism that opposed a genuine desire for national independence. The chapter shows that most activists did not adhere to binary treatments of the term and that central to many of their accounts was an approach to sovereignty as a form of doing that was intimately connected with concerns around the conditions surrounding mobilization.

Chapter 6 takes a brief step away from activist conceptions of sovereignty in order to examine some of the ways in which they interpreted political manoeuvre and the conditions shaping it. Focus here is on the pervasive concern with credibility and situated rupture, an issue that emerged frequently in interviews and discussions with activists and which evinced a sense of being 'stuck between systems'. Central to their accounts we find a concern with the issues outlined in Chapter 4: long-standing economic exploitation, clientelism, and a repressive Italian state as well as with Sardinia's marginal position within a global bloc of capitalist and interstate exchange. The chapter argues that these concerns were tied together by a view of the national as not being separate from the international but intimately embedded within it but simultaneously detached from it by virtue of the structuring effects of capitalism. Activists from across parties critiqued the Italian state for its favouring of political and economic elites and exploitative economic models whilst often appreciating that they needed to work within the confines of this broader way of doing things.

Chapter 7 finishes the analysis with a return to activists' engagements with sovereignty, drawing from the previous chapters to argue that sovereignty was not only indicative of an understanding of sovereignty as a form of doing but that it was indicative of contrasting forms of doing that related to the experiences of being caught between systems and which can be described in Gramscian terms as a politics of revolution versus restoration/reformation. These varying approaches treated sovereignty in 'myth-making' terms as a means through which activists could establish a unifying national Sardinian will that could navigate the already existing system within and beyond Sardinia, or as a reformative practice that elided a genuine engagement with the contradictions of the modern state form predicated on notions of popular sovereignty that could never be fulfilled within a capitalist system.

Finally, the thesis concludes with an overview of the central findings as well as the implications they have for how we study sovereignty not as a static ideal but in the case of Sardinian activists as a form of doing. It stresses the need for greater attention placed on the ways in which activist demands for sovereignty tell us much about the crises within contemporary configurations of state power and their uneasy interconnections with the highly differentiated effects of capitalist production and exchange which both envelops attempts to contest whilst also excluding them.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

> ‘The discourses of presence and absence that express modern statist accounts of the origins and limits of modern political life are extraordinarily adept at affirming that boundaries are both simple, and are either where they are supposed to be or are becoming dangerously absent. Borders are not this simple, nor should we expect to find them where they are supposed to be’ (Walker 2006: 68-69).
>
> ‘Nationalism does matter – as the fundamental organizing principle of the inter-state order, as the ultimate source of political legitimacy, as a readily available cognitive and discursive frame, as the taken-for-granted context of everyday life’ (Özkirimli 2000: 2).

2.1 Introduction

Before examining Sardinian sovereignty claims and the advantages of the adoption of a Gramscian approach to their study, it is first necessary to provide an overview of the discussions surrounding the concept of sovereignty in IR in order to appreciate the contribution an examination of minority nationalist approaches can make to how we might interpret the term’s continued significance. The chapter places particular focus on the controversies surrounding previously dominant realist definitions of sovereignty that neatly aligned it with the territorial and juridical confines and capabilities of individual states, and which saw a move towards approaches that called for an interrogation and historicization of sovereignty as a political ideal that has and continues to be shaped by a diversity of social forces in highly uneven social circumstances (Weber 1994: 2)[6]. As we shall see, the emerging critical literatures contributed to a greater problematization of what is politically at stake in readings of sovereignty that exclusively tie it to the workings of modern states, producing as they do static and ahistorical depictions of the emergence and development of the sovereign ideal. These discussions are important for the present study as they not only raise important methodological questions surrounding how we approach sovereignty’s definition and analysis but they also draw attention to a persistent lacuna in calls for more inclusive depictions of global politics that have overlooked minority nationalist sovereignty claims.

The chapter begins by outlining realist and neo-realist accounts that have provided the theoretical backdrop for framings of sovereignty as necessarily state-bound. It then outlines some of the ways in which these definitions and their supposed historical origins have been criticized by poststructuralist, postcolonial and historical materialist thinkers on the grounds that they obscure the 'intersections' between political, social, cultural and economic forces, and lead to readings that naturalize historically contingent struggles, hierarchies of 'race, class and gender' (Chowdhry & Nair 2004: 2). These discussions have raised a number of important epistemological concerns, drawing attention to the need to develop reflexive approaches to the study of theory that seek to avoid reifying or essentializing the term's use as well as the importance of situating it within an approach that ties it to the legacies and practices of colonialism and capitalist development.

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[6] See Bartelson 2006 & 2014; Biersteker & Weber 1996; De Carvalho, Schia, & Guillaume 2019; Edkins, Shapiro & Pin-Fat 2004; De Carvalho, Leira & Hobson 2011 for overviews of sovereignty debates within IR. See also Kalmo & Skinner (2010) edited collection to see how these debates have also manifested in law and the political sciences.

The chapter then moves on to examine IR's historic and continued failure to consider nationalisms and nationalism scholarship in engagements with the sovereignty problematique. As I aim to show, such an omission is symptomatic of the limited readings of sovereignty that have characterized IR scholarship (Heiskanen 2019) and is particularly marked in the minimal attention paid to minority nationalist mobilization[7]. In line with a desire to develop more plural portrayals of claims to sovereignty, this chapter calls for a greater engagement with minority nationalisms as cases that can provide us with highly innovative expressions of contemporary attempts to respond to the ambiguities of the sovereign form. It concludes with a brief examination of important discussions taking place within European minority nationalism scholarship that indicate more complex formulations and engagements with sovereignty and which problematize conventional binaries drawn between national/international, politics/economics, identity/class that have long characterized IR formulations.

2.2 The (Neo)Realist Sovereign State

Sovereignty plays a significant role in IR scholarship, symbolic as it is of foundational premises integral to theories of the international system where it has frequently been treated as a central condition of statehood (Clark 2005; Biersteker & Weber 1996; Hobson 2000; Lopez et al. 2018; Tierney 2005; Werner & De Wilde 2001). State-centred treatments of sovereignty in IR are largely rooted in early realist articulations of state structure and subsequent neo-realist re-articulations where it was almost exclusively attributed to the workings of bounded territorial states. As one of the earliest schools of thought in IR as an academic discipline, realist approaches have in many ways come to define the contours of IR scholarship and its definition of sovereignty (Donnelly 2000). Within this 'tradition' sovereignty has served as an indicator of state rationality and decision-making and a delimiter of legitimate political action within an international system lacking a centring authority (Donnelly 2000: 9). As such it has long been understood as an integral feature of the state internally i.e. as a necessary legitimizing factor in the allocation and maintenance of governmental power and denotation of a state's supreme authority within territorial boundaries, and externally, as a basic and recognizable precondition of a state's independence as a bounded political unit (Krasner 1999 & 2001b).

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[7] A quick survey of important publications such as *International Organization*, *International Affairs*, *World Politics*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *European Journal of International Relations*, and *International Political Sociology* shows that in each journal, fewer than a handful of articles have engaged with European minority nationalist mobilisation over the past 10 years, let alone examined their sovereignty demands (see Abulof 2016; Beasley & Kaarbo 2018; Cunningham & Sawyer 2017; Forsbèrg 2013; Grigoryan 2010; Heiskanen 2019; Houle 2015; Lerner 2020; Navari 2014; Robinson 2014; Shadian 2010; Smith 2013; Stanfield 2013; Wimmer 2017).

A response to international idealism that dominated academic discussion at the turn of the 20th century, realism was marked in its focus on the idea that politics was shaped by an innate egoistic human drive for power and the absence of a unifying international governing structure (Donnelly 2000). Such premises were often presented as objective truths and indications of the real impulses and fractures defining international politics. Canonical 'realist' texts primarily understood sovereignty in legal terms as an ordering delineator of the state's authority to enforce law and order within a particular territory whilst also defining juridical and political boundaries between states (Bartelson 1995; Hobson 2000). In the case of prominent classical realist thinkers such as Hans Morgenthau who placed particular emphasis on the egoistic character of human nature, sovereignty was regarded as 'indivisible' supreme legal authority (Morgenthau 1948: 360), playing an arbitrating role between independence and interference in a world where the state functioned as 'the central actor' in international exchanges (Hobson 2000: 2). On occasion he described it as 'impenetrable': 'in a given territory only one state can have authority, that is, supreme authority' (Morgenthau 1948: 344). He writes:

> 'The individual state remains the supreme authority for deciding whether and under what conditions to submit a dispute to international adjudication, and no other state can summon it before an international court without its consent…in a given territory only one state can have sovereignty, that is supreme authority, and that no other state has the right to perform governmental acts within that territory without the consent of the state which has sovereignty over it' (Morgenthau 1948: 344).

In his account the state functioned as the central player and deciding entity in international exchange by virtue of its sovereignty. As indicator of 'supreme authority', sovereignty was a constitutive element of statehood and the international system itself, serving as an organizing condition (Bartelson 1995) that represented the legal and political legitimacy of states to act as individual agents and denoting '[their] capability […] to 'perform governmental acts' within a specified territory (Barkin & Cronin 1994: 109). Significantly, sovereignty marked a clear division between the domestic and the international. Whilst Morgenthau conceded that states may be bound to external factors such as international law, he nonetheless argued that this does not infringe upon sovereignty. Instead, he posited that international laws made sovereignty possible, delimiting 'respect for territorial jurisdiction' (Morgenthau 1948: 344). They, and the system of states itself, are bound to the 'legal enforcement of that respect' and thus reliant on state sovereignty (Morgenthau 1948: 344). On the one hand, sovereignty is perceived as being instituted within the state through the legitimacy of a particular state-bound sovereign. On the other, it requires recognition and acceptance by other states of its legitimacy, its territorial and juridical unity in order to be meaningful.

Subsequent work that developed Morgenthau's ideas also retained a similar understanding of sovereignty and statehood as mutually dependent, each defined *and* defining the lines that separate the national from the international (Hobson 2000). In neo-realist formulations put forward by the highly renowned theorist, Kenneth Waltz, who sought to develop a scientific form of realism, sovereignty continued to function as a crucial ordering condition of statehood (Waltz 2010). The state was perceived as a rational agent with capacities to determine its own course, or in Waltz's terms, to pursue 'self-help' in an anarchic international system[8] (Waltz 2010: 104). Waltz maintained the view that there is no sovereignty outside of the state. He asserts:

> 'to say that a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems, including whether or not to seek assistance from others and in doing so limit its freedom by making commitments to them. States develop their own strategies, chart their own courses, make their own decisions' (Waltz 2010: 96).

In Waltz's particular assessment the state has 'very high or absolute domestic agential power' (Hobson 2000: 5), functioning as the central organizing 'principle' (Ashley 1988; Bartelson 1995: 23) with 'the existence of the international system … dependent on and explained with reference to sovereignty' (Bartelson 1995: 23). Sovereignty was paramount, drawing lines of states' right to non-intervention in a world where the international, or rather, the space outside the state, was conceptualized as being by default anarchic and conflictual where power determines the possibilities for consensus and action (Glanville 2013; Griffiths & Sullivan 1997).

During the 1960s and 1980s IR witnessed an important shift from what were perceived as the shortcomings of classical realist perspectives such as the absolutist implications of its depictions of sovereignty and statehood and the neat lines drawn between domestic and

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[8] There has been literature that has questioned the extent to which Waltz's neo-realism relied on a distorted reading of Morgenthau's work. See Behr, H. & Heath, A. (2009).

international forms of power (Lake 2003). Definitions put forward by influential thinkers from the English School[9] and alternatives as developed by Robert Keohane which combined realist and neoliberal approaches[10] (Keohane 1984) also retained state-centric depictions of sovereignty as seen in realist accounts (Bartelson 1995). In the case of the English School which contributed to a greater appreciation of the 'international' as a potential society with common values and interests, the state, 'or independent political communities, each of which possesses a government and asserts sovereignty in relation to a particular portion of the earth's surface and a particular segment of the human population' were seen as functioning as 'the starting point of international relations' (Bull 1977 as cited in Bartelson 1995: 23) and the arbitrator of cooperation and conflict where "violence [is] an endemic feature of the 'anarchical society'"(Burchill & Linklater 2013: 89). Sovereignty was largely understood as a normative necessity, in some cases functioning as a prerequisite for Kantian norms of self-determination and peace-building and the development of an ordered international system of states (Jackson Preece 1998: 7; Mayall 1990: 30). Robert Jackson describes sovereignty as being 'like Lego: it is a relatively simple idea but you can build almost anything with it, large or small, as long as you follow the rules' (Jackson 1999: 431). The state here continued to function as a coherent, at times 'rational' agent, capable by virtue of its sovereignty to cooperate and consent to international law (Burchill & Linklater 2013: 88). Moreover, it was territorially bounded, marking the 'the territorial limits within which state authority may be exercised on an exclusive basis' (Jackson 1999: 432). Similarly, for Keohane who was particularly preoccupied with international cooperation within a world economy, sovereignty was primarily tied to the state, delineating domestic and international spheres of activity (Keohane 1984: 62)[11].

Accounts from those like Robert Gilpin (1983) and Stephen Krasner (1999) placed greater attention on the influence of international processes and bodies (Hobson 2000) as well as the role of ideas and elite interests (Gilpin in Anon. 2005: 363). However, at the core of Gilpin's theoretical frameworks we continue to find a similar focus on the state as the principal actor or negotiator in the international domain. For Gilpin, 'the essence of the state is its territoriality' and that 'it is the principal actor in the international system. The state is sovereign in that it must answer to no higher authority in the international sphere' (Gilpin 1983: 17). He also writes 'international relations continue to be a recurring struggle for wealth and power among independent actors in a state of anarchy' (Gilpin 1983: 7). Krasner though critical of neorealist, rationalist approaches to sovereignty,[12] continues to favour realist imaginations of power by regularly tying international politics and sovereignty to the policies and actions of states and their rulers (Krasner 1999: 7).

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[9] Although it is often regarded as an individual school of thought in its own right, it can be seen as combining both realism and liberalism. For example, in its continuation of the sovereign state as actor logic and the anarchical system of states model. For examples see Bull (2002) and Hurrell (2007).

[10] Neoliberal within IR refers to a 'school' of thought characterized by a focus on the possibilities for institutional cooperation at an international level. See Keohane (1984) and Keohane & Nye (2012) for examples.

[11] It is worth noting that similar framings of sovereignty have also been pervasive in legal practice where law practitioners continue to evoke state sovereignty as a demarcation of state independence and power of the state. See Eleftheriadis 2010 and Crawford 2006 for discussions of these framings.

2.3 Sovereignty Contested

These characterizations of sovereignty did not go without criticism. The 1980s and 1990s in particular saw a turn to constructivist, feminist, Marxist, post-structuralist, post-colonial critiques[13] which found fault in what was seen as the 'ahistorical' treatment of political power, the state and the modern international system (Agnew 1999; Adamson & Demetriou 2007; Brock 1999; Bartelson 1995: 23; Biersteker and Weber 1996: 5; Lake 2003; Wendt 1992) and in the neat conceptual lines drawn around sovereignty and statehood of realist approaches (Ashley 1988; Caporaso 2000: 4; Inayatullah & Blaney 2004; Walker 1993; Weber 1994). These emerging accounts enabled a greater appreciation of what was politically at stake in determining the nature and locus of the sovereign form. To borrow from Cynthia Weber, they functioned as an 'interruption' (Weber 2010), highlighting how approaches that had treated the bounded sovereign state as a central feature of an anarchical international system, excluded a multiplicity of ways of seeing, thinking, acting, being from analysis.

A key source of dissatisfaction lay in the realist model's attempt to produce universal, rational-choice accounts of IR through the state-as-actor model (Ashley 1984; 1988). IR's grounding in 'modern' epistemologies that favoured the construction of scientifically verifiable and universally applicable theories meant it could not adequately capture the constructedness of the term (see Adamson & Demetriou 2007; Ashley 1988; Ashley & Walker 1990; Bartelson 1995; Biersteker & Weber 1996; Walker 1993; Weber 1994; 2016). Moreover, the perceived increase in the blurredness of the state border, seen for example in changes to telecommunications and influence of transnational bodies, led to a simultaneous scepticism of realist approaches which were unable to account for the changes, ruptures and interconnections produced by global capital and politics (Camilleri & Falk 1992; Camilleri et al. 1995; Sassen 1996; 1998). Processes such as increasing globalization and market integration placed strains on the organizational and legitimizing capacities of sovereignty as a given and constant delineator of political power.

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[12] He differentiates between domestic sovereignty, interdependent sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty and international legal sovereignty (Krasner 1999).

[13] Widely known as the Third debate (Cutler 1999: 74). Led to the emergence and prominence of constructivist theories of international relations which opposed the abstract nature of traditional IR's analytical framework. For important constructivist interventions at the time see Adler 1997; Onuf 1998; Wendt 1987, 1992 & 1995.

More crucially, the new critiques highlighted the ways in which realist formulations were inhibited by an inability to seriously question the epistemological and ontological claims underlying their theoretical approaches. Richard Ashley and Rob Walker (1990) argued that realism's advocacy for the development and pursuit of an objective structuralist rational-actor theory of IR confined theoretical inquiry to work within particular modes of analysis that did not lend themselves to critical and reflexive inquiry into their own limits as partial and biased lenses. The question of limits was by definition excluded, with theory purported to present the world as it was in its most essential. Moreover, anarchy, self-interest and conflict were often identified as innate features of human nature, predetermining the shape of the 'international' domain, its processes, actors, and distribution, grounded on a natural scientific approach that aimed to capture the 'laws' of international politics and its 'independently existing logic' (Ashley 1984: 234).

Such an approach led to reductionist interpretations of international politics that took for granted the normative implications that came with deciding the international's limits (Mayall 1999: 481; Rosenberg 1994). As historical materialist Robert Cox famously stated, realism 'takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized, as the given framework of action. It does not question the present order but has the effect of legitimizing and reifying it' (Cox 1981: 128-129). This reification produced elitist explanations of IR that overlooked the importance of 'practice', namely, 'the moment at which men and women enter with greater or lesser degrees of consciousness into the making of their world' (Ashley 1984: 258). Instead, they were reduced 'to mere objects', outside the construction of the international order and of theory itself (Ashley 1984: 258). Theory became apolitical, outside history and its making.

Nowhere was this 'crisis' more pronounced than in definitions of sovereignty and statehood (Ashley 1988; Ashley & Walker 1990; Bartelson 1995; Walker 1993). Realism's state-as-actor model reflected the adoption of an approach that reduced the significance of political forces and structures that could not be contained within the rational territorial-legal framework presupposed. Sovereignty's organizational function as a delimitation of inside/outside, same/other, involved a number of value judgements regarding *who* was included within the state, *who* could act, and *who* or *what* was worthy of recognition (Bartelson 1995). The normative implications of a state-centric framing of sovereign authority were huge, leading to the exclusion of a multiplicity of actors and voices from theoretical inquiry (Chowdhry &

Nair 2004; Chowdhury & Duvall 2014; Inayatullah & Blaney 1995; Grovogui 1996; 2002; Weber 2016) and silencing political forms of resistance and action left uncaptured when power and legitimacy were perceived as primarily residing in a unified state's governmental or legal will. Questions related to materiality, production, class, culture, gender, race, and so forth were inadequately accounted for when looked at through the prism of state territoriality and legality (Chowdhry & Nair 2004). Worryingly, they were left outside of what was deemed knowable (Bartelson 1995: 6).

The burgeoning critical literature led to a greater interrogation of the 'disciplinary' effects of the production of theory itself as a means through which we not only represent the world but also create or enact the political and its ontic and normative content (Ashley 1984 & 1988; see Der Derian & Shapiro 1989 collection). IR theories were increasingly politicized as 'discursive practices' (Gregory 1989: xx) that 'construct and subjugate' identities and 'subjectivities' (Gregory 1989: xxxi). The introduction of approaches that drew attention to the 'textuality' of theory, its constructed nature and the multiple meanings that emerged from it beyond authorial intention (Gregory 1989: xviii), helped to destabilize the presumed universalism of IR theories. Ashley's characterization of 'modern statecraft' as 'modern mancraft' (Ashley 1989: 303) for example, pointed to the ways in which the definition of sovereign power 'domesticated' 'man by constructing his problems, his dangers, his fears' (Ashley 1989: 303).

By treating sovereignty as a given characteristic of the modern system of states, the new approaches showed how realist accounts had often ignored: 'how, and by virtue of what political practices and representations […] the sovereign state [was] instituted as the normal mode of international subjectivity' (Devetak 2013: 199). Realists had occluded the extent to which sovereignty's definition represented a form of '*doing*' as a means through which 'legitimate' authority centres were established as opposed to a universal ideal (Weber 1994: 4). Moreover, their lack of reflexivity engendered an 'either/or' logic of signification that reduced the possibilities for more plural portrayals of world politics (Ashley 1988; Ashley & Walker 1990: 373; Weber 2016). The 'opposition' between 'sovereignty versus anarchy', for example, 'where the former term is privileged as a higher reality, a regulative ideal and the latter term is understood only in a derivate and negative way, a failure to live up to this idea' (Ashley 1988: 230) resulted in sharp binaries; either something was sovereign or not. Such either/or formulations of sovereign power resulted in exclusionary depictions of subjectivities and identities that find meaning and 'power' through 'plural logoi' (Weber 2016: 39) as shown in Cynthia Weber's examination of queer subjectivities. In part inspired by the work of Roland

Barthes (1975) and his *S/Z* in which he stresses the significance of 'the rule of the *and/or'* in the reading of texts*,* Weber developed Ashley's idea of 'statecraft as mancraft' to consider queer logics of statecraft that: 'require us to appreciate how a person or a thing is constituted by and simultaneously embodies multiple, seemingly contradictory meanings that may confuse and confound a simple either/or dichotomy' (Weber 2016: 40).

The emerging critical literature thus raised an array of new methodological questions, bringing about a much-needed focus on greater interrogation of the exclusionary implications of theory's universalizing claims (Walker 1993). The contribution of arguments such as those of Ashley and Weber lay in an appreciation of the extent to which sovereignty's construction was 'performative' in a Butlerian sense i.e. as a means through which 'subjects' are constituted as 'natural and normal' (Weber 2016: 31). Attempts to destabilize the sovereign ideal went hand-in-hand with a push towards the production of accounts that made room for the multiple voices and struggles of agents, processes, relations largely rendered invisible but nonetheless central to world ordering[14]. Theorists of IR needed to pay close attention to the messiness of politics, subjectivity and meaning-making as well as to the 'historicity' of their approaches as reflections of inherited 'scripts' (Der Derian 1989: 4).

2.4 The Westphalian Model

At the heart of attempts to question realist definitions of sovereignty and the state were attempts to consider alternative histories of world power. IR scholarship had long attributed the origins of the modern interstate system to the Peace of Westphalia, a series of settlements signed at the close of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 (Krasner 1999: 78; see also Croxton 1999; Osiander 2001; Inayatullah & Blaney 2004: 20-28). The story frequently told was that the agreements made between representatives of the feuding Catholic Habsburgs and 'Denmark, the Dutch Republic, France, and Sweden, as well as the German princes' (Osiander 2001: 252) paved the way for a new era of political self-determination (Glanville 2013). In spite of there being no direct mention of sovereignty in the treaties themselves, their signing was often regarded as the defining moment when the European system of states was not only created but when the legalistic and territorial definitions of sovereignty became foundational elements of world organization (Clark 2005: 59). The treaties were thought to have fixed the recognition of states' right to self-determination, giving primacy to 'negative' conceptions of legitimate inter-state exchange[15] (Glanville 2013) where non-intervention was established as a central norm for inter-state interaction and cooperation.

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[14] Linked to this critical literature that draws attention to the exclusionary implications of sovereign power is also extensive work influenced by Agamben's theorization of sovereignty which regards the sovereign as the deciding entity of the 'state of exception' (Agamben: 1998). Examples can be seen in Thomas Hansen & Finn Steppetat (2005 & 2006).

Attempts to produce more complex depictions of international politics gave way to a questioning of this historiography (Bartelson 1995: 23 Clark 2005; De Carvalho et al. 2011; Glanville 2013; Inayatullah & Blaney 2004; Krasner 1995 & 1999; Lopez et al. 2018; Maroya 2003; Osiander 2001; Piirimäe 2010; Ruggie 1993). In line with the criticisms raised above, the treaties' historical legacy as a founding moment in the birth of modern international relations were criticized for serving to reinforce foundational premises of the realist tradition, foreclosing the possibility of examining the 'actions', 'energies', and 'resistances' (Ashley 1988: 229) that escaped the sovereignty framework delineated above (see Lopez et al. 2018). These alternative stories weakened realist understandings of sovereignty that tied it to the powers and conditions of state territoriality and rationality even further.

Particularly influential attempts to dispel the acceptance of the Peace of Westphalia as the founding moment of modern international relations can be found in the works of postcolonial critics such as Siba Grovogui, whose critique of the 'Westphalian commonsense' (Grovogui 2002: 316) drew attention to the insufficiencies of realist accounts of state formation that reproduced reductionist and Eurocentric depictions of the international system and its governance. The development of post-colonial approaches to IR led to a renewed appreciation of the extent to which 'mainstream IR' had been 'premised on an understanding of power that privileges hierarchy, "rationality", and a predominantly Eurocentric worldview' (Chowdhry & Nair 2004: 3). Grovogui analyzed the study of African states within IR, showing how their characterization as examples of 'failures' to comply with the norms of the international system and to 'live up to requirements of sovereignty' were often depicted as a 'normative lack' (Grovogui 2002: 316) and not as an indication of potential flaws in the realist understanding of the international system of states nor of sovereignty's function as a form of 'regulat[ing] the knowledge, production and circulation of the means of war and violence' (Grovogui 2002: 323). This dismissal of African states was symptomatic of wider political and cultural hierarchies where Western ideals of non-intervention had been favoured over others in the discipline of IR. Far from representing neutral framings of world politics, these, he argued functioned as 'mechanisms of global governance' (Grovogui 2002: 321) that limit the capacities for participation of non-western states, perpetuating Eurocentric political and economic distributions of power.

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[15] Negative here refers to an approach that considers legitimate political and legal action as limited by the principle of non-intervention.

Other highly influential accounts that have criticised the Euro-centric depictions of sovereign power of the Westphalian common sense can also be found in the works of thinkers such as Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney (2004) who have drawn attention to the very 'thin' depiction and conceptualization of 'cultural interactions' particularly those taking place beyond the 'West' (Inayatullah & Blaney 2004: 1)[16]. More specifically they argue that 'IR misses the way international society—as both a system of states and a world political economy—forms a competition of cultures in which the principles of sovereignty and self-help work to sanctify inequality and subjugate those outside of the centers of "the West"' (Inayatullah & Blaney 2004: 2). Framings of sovereignty that tie it to the 'formalities' of states have been unable to adequately appreciate the kinds of subjugations experienced by political actors unaccounted for and unrecognized in the Westphalian myth (Inayatullah & Blaney 2004: 19). Like Grovogui, such criticisms have drawn attention to the ways in which the non-West is often 'caricatured' and the extent to which the Peace of Westphalia narrative has required a certain homogenization of 'culture' in order to create societal norms of sovereign legitimacy and recognition (Inayatullah & Blaney 2004: 38).

In terms of the Westphalian model's historical 'accuracy' a number of alternative readings have since been provided that also question the depiction of the Westphalian moment. Notably, Osiander argues that the war was not waged as a response to Habsburg expansion but was sustained by 'Denmark, the Dutch Republic, France, Sweden and the German princes' through 'deliberate planning, absent from any immediate threat, and in order to aggrandize themselves' (Osiander 2001: 260). This goes against the standard account that poses the conflict between the Habsburgs and the protestant alliance as 'the struggle between universalism and particularism, or between empire and sovereignty' and instead points to particularist expansion projects that underlined the struggle (Osiander 2001: 260). Osiander's analysis carries significant implications for the pervasive view that regards the non-interventionist principle as a formative element in the establishment of the international system of states, pointing as it does to more aggressive modes of interaction between disputing parties.

Marxist or historical materialist scholarship particularly in the interrelated discipline of International Political Economy (IPE), has also extensively contributed to attempts to probe the Westphalian common sense, drawing attention to the much-neglected economic roots of the sovereign state ideal and its historic interconnections with the uneven development of capitalism[17]. Much like post-structuralist and post-colonial accounts outlined above, historical materialist critiques problematized realism's representation of the world as 'value-free' (Cox 1981: 130). In a similar spirit to Ashley and Walker, renowned historical materialist scholar Robert Cox also signalled the important political choice facing IR theorists, between adopting 'problem-solving' perspectives that 'take the world as [we] find it' (Cox 1981: 128) and perspectives that 'do not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing' (Cox 1981: 129). We see a comparable focus on the methodological and political significance of questioning what we take for granted. In the famous words of Cox: 'theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose' (Cox 1981: 129).

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[16] For other equally insightful accounts see Branch 2012; Chowdhury & Duvall 2014; Hansen & Stepputat 2005; Hobson 2007 & 2014; and Pourmokhtari (2013).

Similar to postcolonial scholarship, the contributions made by historical materialist accounts lay in their focus on the mutually constitutive nature of the physical means through which production is organized and the practices, knowledge, belief systems that make such organization possible. Echoing Marx's view that production is an intrinsic feature of the *reproduction* of human life and the satisfaction of human needs (Cox 1987: 13; Bruff 2009: 345), these analyses have gone against approaches that treat the economic and political or the material and ideational as separate spheres. Instead, they have argued for the development of approaches that consider discourses as constitutive elements of both 'production relations' i.e. the general 'social relations that govern the way [production] is done' (Cox 1987: 13) and the 'social relations of production' i.e. the 'patterns' or 'configurations of the social groups engaged in' productive processes (Cox 1987: 13). We find here an account that sees 'capital' not as an external bounded object but as a 'process' and 'social relation' central to current 'intersubjective' relations and inequalities (Cox 1987: 24). Perceived splits between the 'economic' and 'political' or 'private' and 'public' spheres of political activity and 'authority', for example, have been questioned and attributed to the effects of the emergence and consolidation of capitalist production, predicated in part on the depoliticization of surplus accumulation within the modern state form (Cutler 1999 & 2002).

Particularly instructive in these discussions have been examinations of the 'uneven and combined development of capitalism'[18] which have drawn attention to how the expansion of

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[17] For a good overview of influential accounts see Morton 2007a & b.

[18] This is a notion commonly attributed to the Leon Trotsky which he used to refer to the differentiated process of capitalist development and which historically 'compels [...] states in the capitalist periphery to engage in developmental catch-up with their more advanced counterparts' (Morton 2011: 12). See Trotsky (1980).

capitalist relations and crucially of the territorial state form did not occur evenly as a neat transition from the pre-modern to the modern but was also based on 'capitalism's' uneven 'chronological expansion' (Morton 2007: 47) that was accompanied by processes of 'primitive accumulation' in which large communities were stripped of access to land and subsistence (Morton 2007a: 44), as well as the emergence of new technologies that facilitated productivity and the confrontation of these with the absolutist state which benefited from greater military concentration and centralized tax systems (Lacher 2005). These analyses have contributed to showing that 'the world is an intrinsically differentiated and unevenly developed social totality' (Bruff 2010a: 620), and have facilitated an engagement with the geopolitical nature of inequality and the extent to which the international system as we know it has depended on the deliberate exploitation of large segments of the world's population as well as the often-unintended consequences of the transformation of production relations. As such, they have facilitated a much-needed unpacking of the effects of class antagonisms (who owns what and how) in the shaping of territorial boundaries and state legitimacy that dispel notions of the state as a unitary entity, a reflection of some sort of alignment of the state's institutional organization and a clear sovereign will.

Amongst the most well-known critiques are those put forward by Justin Rosenberg (1994) and Benno Teschke (2003) both of whom considered the centrality of capitalist production in the emergence of the state and sovereignty principle[19]. Rosenberg (1994) argued that as a 'conservative ideology' that considers 'the modern state' as 'the natural starting point', realism presupposed the separation of economic and political domains as separate areas of activity thus depoliticizing economic interests and actions (Rosenberg 1994: 3). Rather than constituting a neutral position, however, this separation of the political and economic is rather a reflection of the consolidation of capitalist relations through the state form that has relied on the relegation of 'surplus extraction' to a 'private sphere' of activity, a 'civil society' removed from the 'jurisdiction' of the state proper (Rosenberg 1994: 84-85; 125-126). As an emblem of political absolutism and legitimacy, sovereignty helped abstract state politics from 'the private sphere of the market' (Rosenberg 1994: 123-124), placing the locus of absolute legitimate power within the state and thus rendering the latter synonymous with politics proper. This in turn created the sense 'of the state being outside, over against civil society' (Rosenberg 1994:

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[19] Another notable and important thinker in these debates is Hannes Lacher (2005: 33) who questions the linearity of the sovereign state's emergence and stresses the need to consider changes or 'ruptures' in social property relations when accounting for the relationship between the territorial state, interstate system and capitalism. For more recent interventions that expand on the topic to consider the importance of non-European contexts, see also Anievas & Nişancıoğlu 2015.

127), maintaining hierarchies of social class in which the 'economic' or 'private' domain of surplus extraction was excluded from the state's remit and thus depoliticized.

Teschke's account developed Rosenberg's ideas and questioned the linearity presupposed in Westphalian narratives of the birth and development of the territorial sovereign state system, drawing attention to the uneven development of state formation. Bringing to the fore a 'historical inquiry' (Teschke 2003: 3) focused on transformations in social property relations, his analysis problematizes the idea that the Peace of Westphalia inaugurated the 'modern' epoch of the territorial state system, showing that modern sovereignty was actually the product of the messy establishment of the capitalist state in England between the 17th and 19th centuries which combined with pre-capitalist absolutisms of the Ancien Régime. Similar to Rosenberg, he characterizes 'modern sovereignty' (Teschke 2003: 151) as 'predicated on an abstract, impersonal state, existing apart from the subjective will of its executive' and 'the separation of public office from private property' (Teschke 2003: 171).

Whilst a close engagement with these accounts lies beyond the scope of the present study they do, however, contribute to a politicization of sovereignty as a term that is far from a neutral marker of state legitimacy and power but also a central factor in the reification of capitalist and colonial exploitation and the state's role therein. Moreover, historical materialist literatures' appreciation of the necessary reciprocity between 'ideas' and 'material capabilities' as related dimensions of production is methodologically significant, aiding the development of accounts that capture the structuring influence of social 'property relations' which have resulted in 'vertical' hierarchies between those who have greater or less 'control' over the organization of production (Cox 1981: 134). Debates in 'neo-Gramscian' scholarship[20] have contributed to closer examinations of the ideological and cultural significance of the emergence and development of capitalist social relations which are not only expressed in the ways in which production and accumulation take place but are also manifest in societal norms. An appreciation of this process has been important in making sense of changes in capitalism's development that have transformed state sovereignty (e.g. neoliberalism)[21] but also in the unevenness of their reception as contested and not uniformly experienced (see Bruff 2011; Morton 2007a & 2011). In not dissimilar terms to approaches that have considered the performativity of discourses as forms of political practice through which we construct and enact identities and subjectivities, the implication here is that ideas such as sovereignty are themselves productive forces integral to not only the sustenance of social life but also to its organization.

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[20] Like most disciplinary labels 'neo-Gramscian' is a somewhat controversial term used to distinguish the approaches that emerged in part from the works of Cox and the incorporation of Gramscian readings of IR and IPE. What tied many of these approaches together was a '[rethinking of] prevalent ontological assumptions in IR due to a theory of hegemony that focuses on social forces engendered by changes in the social relations of production, forms of state and world order' Bieler & Morton 2004: 105). For more critical takes see Ayers 2008.

[21] For notable examples see Bieler & Morton 2001a; Bruff 2014; Gill 1993; 1995; 2008.

2.5 Sovereignty, Nationalism and IR

The debates here outlined are significant for the study at hand, drawing attention to important challenges surrounding the definition and study of sovereignty and the increasing shift from conventional state-centric approaches that once characterized IR scholarship towards alternative portrayals of political power that called for greater sensitivity to the historicity of the state form. As we have seen, they led to significant interrogations of the limits and disciplining effects of the production of theory and destabilized the givenness of state-centric accounts of sovereignty that came at the expense of a wide array of social forces and relations that shape and have shaped global politics. Indeed, they emphasized the need to push beyond the givenness of state boundaries and to be cognisant of the disciplining effects of theory and definition whilst showing sensitivity to the histories, conditions and antagonisms shaping sovereignty's continued significance. These discussions are important for an appreciation of the challenge of defining minority nationalist interpretations of sovereignty which as we shall see in our analysis of Sardinian independentist accounts, raise similar concerns surrounding the concept's historicity, its embeddedness within uneven conditions, its usage by particular forces and the impossibilities of static, binary and absolutist conceptualizations of political power.

They are also important, however, in drawing attention to the notable absence of a serious engagement with nationalism in discussions surrounding sovereignty in the discipline at large. There is some consensus that nationalism has remained a peripheral focus in theories of IR where it has frequently been conflated with state identity (Berenskoetter 2014; Griffiths & Sullivan 1997: 54) and where '*national* identity' is largely 'taken for granted' in accounts of the sovereign state (Mayall 1999: 477). Jan Jindy Pettman notes: 'IR called up the nation-state, while displaying very little interest in either nation or state, or the meaning(s) of the hyphen in between' (Pettman 1998: 149). The congruence often attributed to state and nation has been done at the expense of a serious engagement with the differences between ideas and roles of state and nation, ascribing homogeneity to state populations as static, perennial, culturally and politically unifiable (Mandelbaum 2013: 524-5). More recently, Jaakko Heiskanen (2019: 319) notes that within IR scholarship, nationalism has been relegated to the status of 'spectra' lying on the outskirts of IR but nevertheless implicitly recognized as an important political phenomenon in the international's constitution (Heiskanen 2019: 315). Nationalism within IR theory and particularly in its treatment of sovereignty is both 'present and absent', both treated as a threat to international order to be 'exorcised' and a constitutive feature of the inter*national*

(Heiskanen 2019: 315-316)[22]. When scholars such as Mayall *have* explicitly examined nationalism, it 'is reduced to an external threat' and not perceived as an integral feature of the development of modern notions of statehood and sovereignty (Heiskanen 2019: 316).

This absence of a serious engagement with nationalism has not been exclusive to realist scholarship but is also marked in the discipline at large including critical literatures that have explicitly sought to deconstruct discourses of state power. Whilst calls for a move away from the exclusivities of statist imaginaries and their historic ties to racializing, gendered, exclusionary forms of politics have been vital in dispelling the givenness and superiority of the sovereign state form[23], we continue to see a conceptual thinness surrounding nationalism which is often simply relegated to a politics of exclusion[24]. There have been few attempts to seriously unpack the extent to which nationalisms have also constituted dynamic political struggles that question either/or binaries of political belonging. Critical work that has focused on 'the persistence of nationalism' such as Angharad Closs-Stephen's important contribution to critical IR and human geography, has framed nationalism as something to be superseded given its use as a 'tool' for states to 'discriminate between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Closs-Stephens 2013: 1). Such an approach, whilst important in dispelling the givenness of the national form which has been at the heart of highly exclusionary colonial expansionist projects, risks reproducing static and totalizing depictions of nationalisms themselves. In the case of historical materialist literatures, we find a similar conceptual thinness surrounding nationalism despite calls for a re-appraisal of 'national' and 'state' politics, as 'points of departure' (Bieler & Morton 2004; Bruff 2010a: 622; Davidson 2009; Dufour 2007; Morton 2007a; Worth 2011) and an appreciation of the 'national' as a 'nodal' point in relations of production and symbol of cultural, political and economic unevenness (Morton 2007a: 99-101).

Whilst the importance of attributing appropriate weight to nationalism's historic embroilment in statism, empire and capitalist expansion is crucial in our ability to produce research that aims not only at description but developing critical and reflexive approaches to world politics, we also need to be wary of seeking to move away from an engagement with nationalism's historic and present significance too quickly. As Walker sagely reminds us in his critique of the rise of cosmopolitan approaches that herald the end of state boundaries, 'while many established boundaries may be less significant than they were, it is not all obvious that boundaries are becoming any less significant in our political lives' (Walker 2006: 57). We need to engage with nationalism's 'persistence' given its continued significance in shaping contemporary political imaginaries and conditions. Whether in its historic interconnection with the establishment and maintenance of states (as in the case for example of 19th century nationalisms that contributed to the establishment of Germany and Italy) or as an expression of resistance to colonization and oppression (such as post 1919 with the break-up of colonial empires or following the demise of the Soviet Union), nationalism has shaped and continues to shape collective discourses of the state and life within it. By relegating nationalisms to a peripheral concern in theories of IR, we repeat the similar flattening depictions of the state and interstate system so heavily criticized in realist approaches which in the words of Biersteker and Weber: 'tend to combine population, territory, authority, and recognition - the principal constitutive elements of sovereignty - into a single, unproblematic actor: the sovereign state' (Biersteker & Weber 1996: 21).

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[22] See also Berenskoetter 2014; Mandelbaum 2013; Pettman 1998; Stullerova 2014; Tickner 2003: 320.

[23] For examples see Agnew 1999; Campbell and Shapiro 1999; Doty 1996a & 1996b; Hobson 2007 & 2014; Inayatullah & Blaney 2004.

[24] An example of this sentiment can be found in Bartelson's dismissal of Keating's call for plurinational democracies: 'This solution of course begs the question of why the nation should still be conceived of as the exemplary form of community, and to what extent it should be regarded as the predominant source of political will in a world in which the very idea of distinct and bounded national identities is under challenge' (Bartelson 2006: 470).

Indeed, the study of nationalism has much to contribute to attempts to question the accepted trajectories behind the emergence of sovereignty and the modern state, drawing attention to the uneven and highly contentious nature of their development. Existing nationalism scholarship has provided important historical insights into the 'contingency' (Mayall 1999: 481) and historicity of state configurations as embedded in complex social conditions and the result of concrete engagements by social forces historically situated in particular and yet ever-evolving productive relations. Like historical materialist and postcolonial analyses considered previously, the highly influential accounts of nationalism scholars such as Benedict Anderson, John Breuilly, Eric Hobsbawm, Anthony Smith, amongst many others, situate the emergence and development of nationalism within a wider context of capitalist development and rapid transformation that accompanied the emergence of capitalist production, consolidation of the centralized state, and colonial expansion. Far from a politically neutral form, nationalism's development paints a complex picture of the establishment and consolidation of the sovereign state as a means through which different social forces created hegemonic polity distributions, playing an important role in the eventual consolidation and spread of capitalist relations, softening the atomizing effects of industrialization and mass urbanization that would transform social conditions in Europe (Gellner 1983) but also in war, creating powerful imaginaries needed for mass conscription and sacrifice (Breuilly 1993: 21) thus helping to preserve state bodies, economic interests and mass acquiescence.

Early forms of nationalism in the 1830s and 1880s in France helped consolidate the large centralized state as the means for economic integration and expansion of capitalist relations, providing as it did a ‘monopoly of currency’, ‘public finances’ and the ‘guaranteed security of property and contracts’ (Hobsbawm 2013: 28). It also constituted a reactionary response to said ‘bureaucratic absolutism’ and the perceived culturally flattening effects of the ‘growth of a free-market economy’ that ‘[extended] beyond individual states’ that ‘gave rise to ideas about society as a ‘private’, largely self-regulating set of activities’, as well as ‘the idea of an enlightened state detached from society which it ruled according to rational norms’ in cases such as Germany (Breuilly 1993: 55).

Nationalism also played its hand in the emergence of highly racialized discourses of national superiority that accompanied imperialist ambitions at the turn of the 20th century (Benner 2013: 51). Couched in positivist language that saw national identity as indications of biological superiority, such discourses of national difference contributed to highly exclusionary and violent colonial exploitation (Benner 2013: 52). Crucially, it also accompanied the very collapse of dynastic empires and more recently of the Soviet Union (Eastwood 1993). US President Woodrow Wilson’s calls for the guarantee of state independence and territorial integrity and the eventual inclusion of the ‘right of all peoples to self-determination’ in the United Nations Charter (Mayall 1999: 478) were ‘widely accepted by nationalists beyond Europe as applying in principle to themselves as well as the citizens of the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires’ (Mayall 2013: 540), helping to put a final end to ‘the legitimacy of hereditary rule’ and furthering the power and resonance of the doctrine of *popular* sovereignty as a central feature of state legitimacy and indivisibility and universal human rights (Mayall 2013: 541). Nationalism has thus been as Closs-Stephens notes, as much a ‘discourse of power’ as a ‘discourse of critique’ (Closs-Stephens 2013: 1) enabling subaltern anti-colonial movements to also claim cultural and political recognition and independence.

These varied cases draw attention to the political importance of national culture as an affective, legitimating and unifying factor behind political formations, indicating some of the ways in which the development and survival of the modern state and interstate system has also heavily relied on the formation and internalization of particular notions of collective belonging and identity (an important example can be found in Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012). As an ‘ideology’ and ‘form of politics’ (Breuilly 1993: 1) that stresses the primacy ‘of the nation’ (Smith 2010) nationalism has provided states with collective histories as well as reinforced territorial, cultural and political boundaries through the cultivation of languages, customs and traditions (Anderson 2006; Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012). As such it has played an important role in naturalizing and embedding political relations within daily practices and common sense (Billig 1995) which have proven pivotal in preserving the significance of state particularity, rendering the state a natural and eternal entity (for discussions see Smith 1998). In the vivid words of Benedict Anderson, nationalism has contributed to the perception of the state as a natural and eternal 'sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous empty time […] moving steadily down (or up) history' (Anderson 2006: 26) and 'always loom[ing] out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glid[ing] into a limitless future' (Anderson 2006: 11-12).

Crucially, nationalism historically played a vital role in the materialization of discourses of sovereignty, in particular *popular* sovereignty (Yack 2001) which accompanied the passage from the absolutist state and feudal regimes to the liberal democratic state. Smith (2010) and Hobsbawm (2013) trace the historic interconnections between the notion of the nation and popular sovereignty to the emergence of the Republic in the late 1700s which saw the unification of conceptions of the nation and state (Smith 2010) and an alignment between ideals of popular legitimacy and governance with 'civic'[25] claims to national identity. In the case of France[26], Smith argues: '[B]y creating a centralized economic and political territory and a single public culture, the patriots hoped to imbue all French citizens with a fervent ardour for the reborn French republican nation' (Smith 2010: Chapter 3, Section 3., Para. 6). In a rather sympathetic vein, he notes that early nationalism 'attacked feudal practices and oppressive imperial tyrannies and proclaimed the sovereignty of the people and the right of all peoples to determine their own destinies, in states of their own, if that was what they desired' (Smith 1998: 1).

Hobsbawm similarly examines how definitions of the nation in the late 1700s onwards also contributed to a marked shift towards popular sources of sovereign authority:

> 'The primary meaning of 'nation' […] was political. It equated 'the people' and the state in the manner of the American and French Revolutions […] [It] was, or certainly soon became, part of the concept of the nation in an era of the Revolutions that it should be, in the French phrase, 'one and indivisible'. The 'nation' so considered, was the body of citizens whose collective sovereignty constituted them a state which was their political expression. For, whatever else a nation was, the element of citizenship and mass participation or choice was never absent from it […] The equation nation = state =

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[25] The dichotomy between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalisms attributed to the classifications made by Hans Kohn characterizes civic nationalism as being less focused on myth-making and cultural/ethnic markers of national belonging than ethnic variants (Kuzio 2002).

[26] As Kolla notes (2017: 1), instructive here is article 3 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens proclaimed by the French revolutionaries in 1789 which states that 'all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation' as opposed to in the person of the king.

> people, and sovereign people, undoubtedly linked nation to territory, since structure and definition of states were now essentially territorial. It also implied a multiplicity of nation-states so constituted, and this was indeed a necessary consequence of popular self-determination' (Hobsbawm 2013: 18).

Whilst the nature of the interconnections between this triad of elements; state, people, and nation were by no means clear or universal (Hobsbawm 2013: 18), their close association nevertheless helped cement ideas of the indivisibility and legitimacy of the state form. The nation imbued the state with an internal coherence and unity, aligning the polity with the interests of a unified collective which was historically and culturally embedded. Nationalism's resonance with wider society through appeals to popular sovereignty made it, to borrow from Breuilly's well-known words, 'an especially appropriate form of political behaviour in the context of the modern state and the modern state system' (Breuilly 1993: 1), particularly given the increased processes of democratization that accompanied the transition to popular forms of sovereignty that dismantled the rigidities of previous forms of rule and the explosion of war. The latter 'depended on the participation of the ordinary citizen to an extent not previously envisioned' (Hobsbawm 2013: 83).

The close association between nationalism and sovereignty is further evidenced in well-known definitions of the nation and nationalism such as Anderson's characterization of the nation as 'an imagined political community' that is 'both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson 2006: 6) and Breuilly's definition of nationalism 'as a political ideology which claims that there exists a unique nation, that this nation has a special value and therefore right to existence and recognition, and that to secure this right the nation must possess autonomy, often understood as a sovereign nation state' (Breuilly 2013: 1-2). In an overview of the 'intellectual origins' of nationalism, Erica Benner states: 'if the early modern language of nationhood expressed a core idea, it was that legitimate authority should be conferred by a popular mandate, not by a monarch or narrowly based elite; and determined by the sovereign body within a nation, not imposed from without' (Benner 2013: 38). Walker Conner similarly states: 'the rationale for national self-determination is inseparable from the rationale for popular sovereignty' (as cited in Abulof 2018: 533). In sum, nationalism cannot be understood or easily divorced from sovereignty and vice-versa.

There are some noteworthy parallels between the accounts here outlined and the debates surrounding sovereignty in IR. The emphasis on the historicity of the nation-state ideal as the product of concrete struggles between antagonistic and/or converging social forces in pursuit of varying political aims, problematizes the givenness of the state form, echoing arguments made by historical materialist and post-colonial thinkers who have drawn attention to the significance of economic and political interests in the consolidation of the capitalist state as well as those who have drawn attention to the performativity of political discourses as means through which we effect particular forms of politics, identity and subjectivity. Nationalism poses questions for "conventional IR definitions that regard 'sovereign man' as an 'individual, abstract, competitive; free of the links and burdens of collectivity or care" (Pettman 1998: 156), instead emphasizing the culturally and normatively loaded nature of sovereignty and state particularism and the latter's reliance on the construction of a *popular* sovereign will through cultural artifices, customs, languages, 'banal' practices of the everyday (Billig 1995). Crucially, what we also see in these accounts, is a variety in nationalist mobilization, highlighting the limitations of universalizing realist theories of state and inter-state relations that do not adequately account for the cultural, ideological and historical diversity of political relations and interests within states and beyond.

2.6 Minority Nationalisms and Sovereignty

Of course, like any form of scholarship, studies into nationalism have also struggled with notable oversights. Despite extensive contributions to understanding the consolidation of state power, early nationalism theories such as those outlined above have been increasingly critiqued for similar reasons as realist IR theories of state power; namely, a tendency towards statism both in terms of its linkage of nationalism to state politics and its static depictions of terms such as sovereignty. Much like IR's thin treatment of nationalism and sovereignty, nationalism studies did not go far enough in problematizing the relationship between state and nation, nor the nature of sovereignty and international relations, echoing the territorial state centred conceptualizations of 'conventional' approaches in IR as a demarcation of political legitimacy and an 'internationally' recognized right to territorial non-intervention (Jackson-Preece 1998: 6). As Mayall notes (1999: 481), when early nationalism studies did consider international politics, it often did so through a realist lens.

Such a failure to engage in more nuanced and critical readings of sovereignty became particularly marked as a focus on minority nationalisms, also known as nationalism of 'nations without states' (Guibernau 1999: 2) or 'stateless nations' (Keating & McGarry 2001: 10), became an increasingly important focal point following the successes of parties such as the SNP and the pro-independence coalitions in Catalonia that captured electoral imaginations and promulgated enthusiastic calls for independence and national self-determination. A tendency to overlook minority nationalisms as theoretically 'passé' (Laible 2008: 9) had been prevalent within nationalism studies which had a tendency to regard the modern nation-state as a sort of teleological 'end point of political development' (Keating 2001: 1). Important interventions by the likes of Keating and McGarry (2001), however, led to greater interrogation of these approaches which perpetuated unhelpful and exclusionary notions of 'historical evolution' in which 'nationalist conflict' within states was regarded as backward (Keating 2001: 1) and 'peripheral nationalism in European polities […] as an anachronism' (De Winter & Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro: 2002: 484)[27]. As shown by Keating, nationalisms and minority nationalism are ever changing, responding to transformations in social conditions.

Burgeoning comparative studies examining Western European minority nationalist movements have since helped reject the dismissive portrayals of minority nationalisms which were unable to account for the continued significance of minority nationalisms nor unearth the fluid conceptualizations of national identity and sovereignty prevalent in these movements. New literatures studying sub-state nationalisms establish the rarity of 'the monolithic 'nation-state' (Smith 2010: Chapter 2, Section 3, para 23). More specifically, they have drawn attention to the peculiarities of minority nationalist claims which do not always favour either/or notions of state and sovereign power, with many continuing to privilege national identity whilst simultaneously moving away from stringent conceptions of territoriality and political autonomy ordinarily admitted by definitions of state nationalism[28].

The diversity of political ambitions amongst these actors is reflected in the varying ways in which existing scholarship refers to them. Some have chosen to describe them as minority nationalisms on account of the status of the community in question (Keating & McGarry 2001). At other times scholars prefer the term 'regionalism' in order to reflect the territorial situation of these actors within state regions and the kinds of strategies they engage in which place emphasis on the political, cultural, economic significance and distinction of the region in question (Mazzoleni & Meuller 2016). 'Ethnoregionalism' is used to describe movements that identify with a 'territorially based 'exclusive group identity' aimed at not only serving 'ethnic group interests but also regional interests' and which do not always seek nationhood (Türsan 1998: 5-6), whereas separatism or secessionism are often used to describe those seeking outright statehood (Muro, Vidal & Vlaskamp 2020). Further definitional ambiguities arise due to the varied nature of their aims, with some movements being desirous of outright statehood and others preferring devolved or federal solutions. Advocates of such movements whilst still defining themselves as members of a nation do not always seek statehood, preferring instead greater autonomy whilst remaining within their current states.

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[27] For an important exception to this approach in early nationalism studies see Connor (1972).

[28] See Casperson 2011; De Winter & Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002; Elias 2008 & 2009; Gillespie 2015; Guibernau 1999; Hepburn 2008; 2009a; 2012; Ichijo 2009; Jordana, J. et al. 2019; Keating 1997, 2001, 2004, 2012; Laible 2008; Lynch 1996; MacCormick 1996; McCrone 2001; Keating & McGarry 2001; McGarry & Keating 2006; Pettman 1998; Tierney 2005.

Where there is some agreement is on their characterization as nationalist in so far as they tend to advocate the existence of a nation with a unique cultural, linguistic and political heritage and deserving of greater self-determination (Keating 2001: 25). Moreover, independence or outright secession, for example, are not necessarily equated with greater sovereignty. Comparative studies show that minority nationalists are often acutely aware of sovereignty's limits within a context of globalized and neoliberal marketization, using sovereignty to refer to the establishment of alternative political and economic distributions symbolic of capacities to pool power across different 'levels' of governance, e.g. local, regional, transnational (Hepburn 2011; Jolly 2015; Jordana et al. 2019; Keating 1996; 1997, 1998; 2001 & 2014; Lecours 2012; Walker 2003). Notable instances include Scotland and Catalonia where nationalist movements have to differing degrees embraced Europeanization as a platform for political recognition and economic opportunity (Ichijo 2009; Keating 1996). As such, these movements are valuable not only in so far as they constitute complex materializations of narratives of collective belonging but they also challenge conventional definitions of sovereignty (Jackson-Preece 1998).

Attempts to make sense of minority nationalists' more utilitarian attitudes towards sovereignty and statehood have raised a range of important and overlapping issues such as transformations in territorial and institutional loci of economic and political power and action (Keating 1997; Hepburn 2009a). Of particular significance in the case of European minority nationalisms is the EU and the growing influence of the single market, which has played an important role in the so-called re-scaling of sovereignty, offering political and economic incentives for both secession *and* devolution in the way of economic aid (Jolly 2007; Keating & Bray 2006). On the one hand, funding incentives and the 'security afforded by EU membership' has made 'the drive for full sovereignty more appealing' (Baldacchino & Hepburn 2012: 561), enabling greater integration within global networks of political and economic exchange. On the other, EU regional investment pools have facilitated access to a variety of economic and institutional initiatives that are not bound to state government (Keating & McGarry 2001). As a result, we have seen a greater 'emphasis on indigenous growth, or the attraction of investment by qualities linked to the region such as the environment, the quality of life, or a trained labour force, rather than on investment incentives provided by the state' (Keating 1997: 386). For scholars such as Keating, these changes have led to both a 'deterritorialization' and a 'reterritorialization of economic, political, and governmental activity', transforming the nature and significance of centralized state action, and giving way to a simultaneous 're-localization' of economic and political strategies within minority nationalist regions (Keating 1997: 383).

Tierney makes a similar argument and points to the growing strategic importance placed on an international or transnational context of exchange (Tierney 2005: 172). 'Paradiplomacy' and sub-state nationalist group's capacity to exploit opportunities presented by regional, national and global 'levels', are highlighted as important contributing factors with regional entities 'asserting' greater 'international presence' (Tierney 2005: 170). He argues:

> 'the goal of enhanced constitutional *autonomy* for the society's territorial space now makes reference to not only the State but also membership of international organizations; the search for improved institutional *representation* for the society now targets not only the central State but also the international community; and the desire for general *recognition*' (Tierney 2005: 163).

Sovereignty is not necessarily perceived by minority nationalisms as being compromised through greater global integration, but is often seen as enhanced, enabling increased participation in international economic and political infrastructures. Neil Walker characterizes this kind of formulation of sovereignty as 'graduated' and the favouring of a 'more-or-less' approach to political power as opposed to the 'binary' 'either-or' approaches seen most notably in the state-centric conceptualizations considered previously (Walker 2018: 8-9). Walker also notes the significance of what he terms 'reflexive nationalism' within Western minority mobilization which sees its goals as 'provisional rather than final, cumulative rather than predetermined' and which 'focuses the shifting nexus between a fluid collective subject − a putative "people" whose very membership and territorial extension is revisable and contestable (Keating 2017) and an adjustable set of political institutions and goals' (Walker 2018: 11). This approach contrasts markedly with 'teleological' forms of nationalism which are primarily focused on achieving an always 'fixed' end, usually in the guise of the 'binary' absolute sovereign form (Walker 2018: 10). Others such as Emmanuel Dalle Mulle and Ivan Serrano in an analysis of Catalan and Scottish party documents make a related claim; namely, that minority nationalisms are not 'monist' about their aims but rather favour more 'pluralist' approaches to independence, '[combining] arguments in sometimes untidy and non-hierarchical ways' (Dalle Mulle & Serrano 2019: 646), a reflection of the fraught constitutional, economic and political basis of minority nationalist recognition within states.

Explanations for the appearance and intensification of minority nationalist sentiment has varied, with some accounts emphasizing the significance of cultural, linguistic and ethnic factors[29], others drawing attention to the ways in which the latter's alignment with structural (economic, territorial, political, institutional) disparities, or 'cleavages' between regions has also contributed to minority nationalist mobilization (Pala 2016; Urwin 1992). What the literatures show is that it is difficult to provide an all-encompassing theory of the reasons for increased nationalism at sub-state level given important contextual differences such as marked wealth disparities and institutional distributions between cases. In his analysis of 'secessionist' movements alone, Sorens draws attention to significant variations in contributing factors such as 'lack of irredentist potential, relative affluence, geographical noncontiguity, population, and multiparty political system' (Sorens 2005: 304).

Recent commentators have emphasized the significance of identity difference which not only manifests in national recognition but also in contrasting political commitments. Montserrat Guibernau frames the Scottish, Flemish and Catalan cases as instances of 'emancipatory nationalisms' which 'do not feel represented by the state of which they are a part and do not feel politically and culturally recognized as nations by the state containing them' and which '[defend] the nation's right to decide upon its political future by democratic means and it includes the right to secession' (Guibernau 2013: 372)[30]. Others have focused more specifically on the interplay between ethnic and cultural identity and economic relations. In an important early explanation, Michael Hechter (1975) argued that peripheral nationalisms were the product of 'internal colonialism' that accompanied the expansion of industrialization in areas such as Scotland and Wales which became increasingly economically dependent on an 'English core' (Hechter 1975: 30) and distinguished by 'occupational niches' (Hechter 1978: 300). Another related account came in the way of Tom Nairn's well-known analysis of 'peripheral nationalisms' which attributed significant weight to the effects of the uneven development of capitalism in the formation of nationalism in 'peripheries' as a 'short-cut' pursued by local elites to avoid domination (Nairn 2003). Nairn criticized the abstracting nature of the 'Westphalian' 'nation-state' ideal, outlining the relationship between nationalism and uneven development (Nairn 2003: xiii). Drawing extensively from Marx's analyses of the capitalist state and the emergence of the separation of civil and political spheres (Nairn 2003: 6), Nairn's work treats 'peripheral' nationalisms as a response to the economic transformations that saw the consolidation of the 'modern' state, founded on the 'mythology' and 'impersonal' concept of sovereignty (Nairn 2003: 4-14). Nationalism represented a 'populist' response, an attempt in more ‘backward’ areas (Nairn 2003: 327-328) to contest the domination of the ‘impersonal’ (Nairn 2003: 13-14) capitalist British state with its highly abstracted discourses of sovereignty that could not account for nor resolve class and regional deprivation. He saw revolutionary potential in ‘peripheral nationalisms’ as means through which communities could overthrow the ‘arcane mystique’ of ‘sovereignty’ tied to the workings of the British capitalist state (Nairn 2003: 49).

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[29] See Burg's (2015) analysis of the significance of identity and national recognition for Catalan independence supporters.

[30] For an example that focuses on the significance of fiscal arguments for independence in Catalonia as opposed to Guibernau's emphasis on identity see Serrano (2013).

Scholars have since questioned the generalizability of both Hechter and Nairn’s descriptions of the development of peripheral nationalisms on the grounds that minority nationalisms have not only emerged in ‘under-developed’ regions but also in ‘overdeveloped’ cases such as Catalonia (Smith 1998: 62). In a recent analysis of Catalonia, Flanders, Scotland and Northern Italy for example, Dalle Mulle (2017) examines the development of ‘nationalisms of the rich’ which have framed their claims for national independence on the basis of their economic exploitation as wealthy peripheries. What these varied accounts nevertheless indicate, is the significance of a range of factors contributing to the materialization of minority nationalist mobilization, and crucially, of the difficulties in separating experiences of political, economic, territorial and cultural unevenness in the formation of nationalist demands for sovereignty. They point to the need to devote greater attention to individual cases in order to capture variations in class relations, status of the regions in question and the basis of their claims to national identity and stress an array of complex pressures informing minority nationalist conceptualizations of sovereignty that remain unaccounted for when the latter is solely understood as territorial non-intervention and state agency. Far from constituting a monolithic ideal, what they show is that nationalism is messy and enduring, a means through which varying social forces have sought to carve difference, to exclude, to include, to contest, to resist, to adhere, in an age shaped by the sinews of capitalist expansion and state centralism.

2.7 A Turn to Minority Nationalisms

If nationalism has been understudied in IR then minority nationalisms have been rendered almost invisible in discussions of sovereignty, statehood and the interstate system. A quick survey of important publications such as *International Organization*, *International Affairs*, *World Politics*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *European Journal of International Relations*, and *International Political Sociology* shows that in each journal, fewer than a handful of articles have engaged with European minority nationalist mobilisation over the past 10 years, let alone examined their sovereignty demands[31]. The primary aim of this thesis is to respond to this omission, bringing minority nationalist sovereignty claims to the fore and pointing to some of the ways in which minority nationalists explicitly posit the question of national and political alignment, interrogate state configurations and sovereign authority and highlight the political nature of 'nationality claims […] as a form of politics, to be argued, debated, and mediated, rather than as a set of absolutes which could be settled through universal abstract reasoning' (Keating 2001: 29). As the debates here show, to refute a close engagement with these cases means we fall into the traps of essentialist readings of what nationalism means and does. Moreover, we negate the continued significance of nations within contemporary politics. Nationalism still *matters.* To borrow from the Tom Nairn, it 'provides […] something real and important' (as quoted in Davidson 2016: 73-74).

Crucially, the thesis also aims to serve as a bridge between critical IR literatures on sovereignty here discussed and examinations of minority nationalist articulations of the term. Literature on minority nationalisms has not yet completely shirked static depictions of sovereignty's formulation and are often hindered by a desire to develop problem-solving approaches that 'respect universal laws of liberalism and democracy' (Keating 2001: 2). The literature here described is often too clean, too focused on creating neat classificatory overviews of the manifestation of minority nationalism whilst simultaneously underplaying the radical nature of nationalist claims and the extent to which minority nationalists not only seek recognition and self-determination but in some cases, to transform the political and economic conditions within and outside the state. A greater interrogation of the political implications of the study of sovereignty and nationalism is necessary in order to avoid underplaying the messiness of nationalist discourse, the ways in which activists question classifications and use sovereignty to pose critiques of the very international system within which they find themselves in. Moreover, whilst we have seen significant contributions in an appreciation for the changing ways in which these movements have articulated the term in response to transformations in function and significance of the state, much less has been done to unpack the ways in which these contesting forms are constructed by activists within the context of their daily political exchanges or the variations that exist within cases (Dalle Mulle & Serrano 2019; Lluch 2014). Tied to this, is a failure to provide an adequate account for the manifestation of social relations of production within these movements with the issue of class and capitalism often treated more as independent variables and not integral features of the story of nationalism itself (Keating 2014a).

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[31] See Abulof 2016; Beasley & Kaarbo 2018; Cunningham & Sawyer 2017; Forsbèrg 2013; Grigoryan 2010; Heiskanen 2019; Houle 2015; Lerner 2020; Navari 2014; Robinson 2014; Shadian 2010; Smith 2013; Stansfield 2013; Wimmer 2017.

IR has also much to gain from an engagement with minority nationalisms currently making waves in Western Europe. As the remainder of this thesis aims to show, minority nationalist articulations of sovereignty tell us much about the possibilities for the transformation of world politics. Significantly, they show us that sovereignty should not be simply regarded as a reifying and abstracting term (Rosenberg 1994: 123-124), but a concept that is reproduced within very specific circumstances and which is intimately interconnected with very real experiences of cultural exclusion and collective identity within the broader workings of a deeply hierarchical political system that often negates expressions of self-determination. A turn to Gramsci is now made to put forward an approach to Sardinian sovereignty claims that does not seek to essentialize its use but rather capture the extent to which sovereignty represents a means through which Sardinian activists pursue varying political objectives whilst simultaneously giving weight to the political landscapes and social pressures described by activists that have contributed to the emergence of the Sardinian question. In line with the critical discussions considered here that have problematized conventional readings of sovereignty, this research aims to account for a) sovereignty as a performative and discursive ideal that serves to delineate political horizons, and b) its situated nature as constructed by social forces located within a wider context of social relations of production. Such a framing enables an engagement with Sardinian nationalist claims that does not diminish the nuanced ways in which they are made while simultaneously embedding sovereignty claims within an approach does not lose sight of the important interconnections between the economic and the political, the national and international, past and present that have contributed to the privileging of particular discourses of sovereignty and nationalism.

Chapter 3: A Gramscian Perspective

> ‘We need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopaedic knowledge, and men as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts, which have to be filed in the brain as in the columns of a dictionary, enabling their owner to respond to the various stimuli from the outside world. This form of culture really is harmful, particularly for the proletariat. It serves only to create maladjusted people, people who believe they are superior to the rest of humanity because they have memorized a certain number of facts and dates and who rattle them off at every opportunity, so turning them almost into a barrier between themselves and others […] But this is not culture, but pedantry, not intelligence, but intellect, and it is absolutely right to react against it’ (Gramsci 1916 in Forgacs 2000: 56-57).

> ‘The crucial notion here is that people make their relations, whether in the intimacy of their private lives or in the apparently remote and impersonal international arena. In the disciplines of international relations and international political economy, it has been the scholars’ habit, or our conceit, either to assume that only elites – diplomats, bureaucrats, bankers, or generals – produce these relations, or to reify the international system so that it appears not to have been produced at all, but to appear as a given’ (Davies 1999: 4).

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter outlines the central theoretical and methodological considerations informing my analysis of Sardinian sovereignty claims. In line with critical discussions outlined in the previous chapter that have highlighted the reductionist and exclusionary implications of realist framings of sovereignty that characterized it as necessarily tied to state governance, rationality and territoriality, the central aim of this chapter is to put forward an approach that a) allows for a nuanced reading of Sardinian sovereignty claims that does not seek to minimize the complex ways in which activists interpret and use the term, and b) that also gives weight to the social conditions and relations shaping activist accounts and which have motivated claims to sovereignty in Sardinia.

With these objectives in mind, the chapter puts forward a Gramscian approach which provides three central advantages: first, it places emphasis on signification or meaning-making as political practice. This is important in making sense of the complex and continuous processes of contestation and mediation shaping the term’s definition and ongoing relevance in Sardinia, and facilitates an analysis that moves away from reified conceptualizations of sovereignty that follow an either/or logic of signification or that regard it as a simple abstraction of capitalist exploitation towards more plural portrayals of activist interpretations. Sovereignty’s use and definition are considered in performative terms as not only representing a static normative or organizational ideal but a way of *doing* politics. Second, the adoption of a Gramscian approach considers activists' sovereignty claims as relationally formed, the product of historically situated processes of meaning-making that occur between social forces in particular material circumstances. Such an approach is crucial in making room for the extent to which sovereignty's definition and use is necessarily tied to a Sardinian context of political struggle. Third, Gramsci was in many ways a theorist of state power and nationalism. Whilst this by no means represented the sole focus of his work, at the heart of his contribution to Marxist debates were his attempts to account for the strategic importance of state formation in the consolidation of bourgeois interests. Central to these discussions was a desire to make sense of the resonance and importance of embedded discourses of national and popular identity that had proven to be both a source of strength and stability for the emerging Italian bourgeoisie whilst simultaneously a source of division due to its class basis which occluded genuine participation by the large and highly impoverished populations in regions such as Sardinia.

Such reflections provide us with useful conceptual framings through which we can interpret the resonance and rejection of notions of sovereignty amongst Sardinian nationalists. Crucially, they are also central to being able to account for the situatedness of the and/or nature of activists' sovereignty claims as not only indicative of diverse ways in which the term might be understood by activists but symbolic of contextual considerations and the kinds of political and economic antagonisms that have shaped Sardinian nationalism which are tied to the uneven legacies of capitalist development, cultural marginalization, and economic exploitation. Ignoring these would flatten activist claims and the ongoing effects of this wider history of political struggle. Moreover, it would risk creating arbitrary incisions between economic and political concerns central to activist accounts. As we shall see in Part 2 of the thesis, activists rarely made such clear distinctions.

It is important to note that the idea is not to suggest that there is one correct way of interpreting sovereignty or Gramsci's work. To do so would be unreflexive and as such wholly un-Gramscian (Showstack Sassoon 2020: 12). Rather, it is hoped that by emphasizing an approach that considers the dialectical relation between material and discursive production we can give appropriate weight to minority nationalist appeals to sovereignty that does not produce abstracting accounts of the ways in which they defined the term or their role as active forces in its making. In keeping with this, the chapter outlines the need for an engagement with sovereignty's use at the level of everyday exchanges and activism. The chapter integrates the adoption of ethnographic methods as means through which we can develop accounts of Sardinian sovereignty claims that favour 'thick description' (Geertz 1973: 3). Such an approach helps to historicize sovereignty claims by situating them within concrete struggles, drawing attention to nationalists' active engagement with sovereignty in the conditions of their daily lives (Hall 2017). Consideration of the situatedness of people's experiences and sovereignty's use gives weight to the challenges, realities, pressures identified by activists as actors who sustain, contest and/or resist.

The chapter is divided into five parts. The first provides a sketch of Gramsci's personal relationship with Sardinia where he holds a special status as a symbol of the island's political heritage. It will outline how Gramsci's sensitivity towards Sardinia and Italy's regional fractures informed a theoretical approach attuned to the very real experiences of political, economic and cultural marginalization as seen in Sardinia. The second part outlines his contribution to Marxist analyses, namely, his problematization of the structure/superstructure binary that enabled him to develop a non-reductionist relational approach to the study of ideology and language as central forms of political praxis. The third part outlines his analysis of state power which was central to his attempt to question the binary between ideas and materiality. Here I will outline the strategic significance Gramsci assigned to the state and the formation of national narratives which enables an appreciation of what nationalism and sovereignty *do*. The fourth section applies this Gramscian perspective to the study of the concept of sovereignty. As we shall see, the adoption of a Gramscian approach requires an engagement with the intricacies, entanglements of the ideas we use to frame political objectives and horizons as relationally constituted, embedded in the fabric of society. Cultural norms, customs, languages are understood as being above all practised, important dimensions in the very composition of the political. Finally, the chapter ends with an outline of the methodological approach adopted whilst conducting research in the field, linking the theoretical considerations outlined to the research and data collection. I examine the methodological implications of a Gramscian approach and how it entails an analysis that focuses on the everyday experiences through which Sardinian activists make sense of their political and economic struggles for or against sovereignty.

3.2 Gramsci and Sardinia

It would be misplaced to not begin this chapter without first acknowledging the special relationship Gramsci had with Sardinia as an islander himself and highly esteemed analyst of Sardinian politics. His Sardinian roots were not only central to his formative years and life-long political activism but are also at the heart of the contributions his writings make to the study of nationalism and Sardinian independentism. Indeed, his spirit looms large in Sardinian political memory, evoked in tired street signs of small villages and in graffiti messages sprayed on faded paint. Gramsci is considered a major cultural and political icon by islanders on both sides of the unification/independence debate. Described in an interview by one passionate independentist as the 'universal thinker', Gramsci's arguments related to cultural identity formation, language, the Southern question, to name but a few, are regarded by many Sardinians as valuable indications of a thinker who was finely attuned and committed to the island's vicissitudes and political struggles. Activists have made frequent use of the Marxist's work (Pili 2017), drawing from his 'internationalism' to insert the Sardinian national struggle within a wider context of global capitalism (Pili 2017), or evoking his work in blogs and websites to reflect on the shortcomings of the Sardinian political and intellectual classes (Lobina 2017).

Born and raised on the island, Sardinia features frequently in his writings. In touching letters to family whilst living in the Italian peninsula (Gramsci 2003), pre-prison articles for publications such as *L'Ordine Nuovo* and *Avanti!* (Melis collection 1975; Gramsci 1994) and in his well-known *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 1971; 1992; 1996 and 2007), Sardinia was never far away in his many discussions of Italian politics and the social fractures dividing what was still a relatively new state. His childhood in rural and impoverished Ghilarza gave him first-hand experience of the regional and class disparities that existed across Italy, furnishing his writings with a concrete sense of the hardships and alienation experienced by the large peasant communities in areas such as Sardinia (see Melis collection 1975 and Davidson 1977). This translated into an often-empathic register towards the political struggles of the island's population. Significantly, it seems to have been a highly important catalyst behind his political activism, informing a sense of rebellion at an early age. In a letter to his wife Julia where he reflects on his anti-Italian sentiment prior to becoming an active member and voice within the workers' movement in Turin he writes:

> 'What saved me from becoming an inanimate wreck? It was the instinct of rebellion, the fact that when I was a child I was against the rich because I couldn't go and study […] That then included all the rich who oppressed the Sardinian farmers and I thus thought that we needed to fight for the national independence of the region: 'Cast the continentals into the sea!' (Gramsci 2003: 35-36)[32]

A keen interest in developments taking place in Sardinia would continue to feature in letters to family and members of the Sardinian communist and Sardist movements (Gramsci 2003: 102;

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[32] Original: 'Che cosa mi ha salvato dal diventare completamente un cencio inanimato? L'istinto alla ribellione, che da bambino ero contro i ricchi, perché non potevo andare a studiare … Esso si allargò per tutti i ricchi che opprimevano i contadini della Sardegna ed io pensavo allora che bisognava lottare per l'indipendenza nazionale della regione: << al mare i continentali!>>' (Gramsci 2003: 35-36).

109; 124; 135; 140; see also Melis 1975: 101; 108; 122). In a letter to Sardinian socialist, Angelo Corsi written in October 1917, he asks:

> 'Could you yourself write some articles on the political and economic movement of the Sardinian Proletariat? Or would you be so kind as to give the task to someone capable of doing it? I think it is useful to make the new Sardinia known in high Italy, and I think that it is also dutiful in order to reinforce the unitary consciousness of the Italian proletariat.' (Gramsci 1917 in Melis 1975: 86)[33]

The importance of this persistent concern with Sardinia's political and economic development was not only significant on a personal level, it also contributed to the development of a sensitive approach to the value and diversity of the experiences of society's most marginalized and exploited and the issue of regional unevenness that was pervasive across Italy (Bellamy & Schecter 1993; Urbinati 1998). As pointed out by Hall:

> "though […] he abandoned his early 'nationalism', he never lost the concern, imparted to him in his early years, with peasant problems and the complex dialectic of class and regional factors […] Gramsci was acutely aware of the great line of division which separated the industrializing and modernizing 'North of Italy from the peasant, under-developed and dependent 'South'" (Hall 1986a: 9).

In a similar vein, historian Guido Melis argues that Gramsci's approach to the Southern question was not so much a reflection of his concern with the North and South as much as it was 'the presence of the constant recall of the Sardinian experience, as a recurring motive and driving thread in a wider reflection on the historic alliance between industrial workers and the peasantry' (Melis 1975: 10).

Such a concern remained an ever-present preoccupation in his writings which addressed amongst other things, the failure of Italian unification to combat economic disparities that emerged along North and South[34] divides which served instead to perpetuate the North's historic exploitation of the South's largely peasant populations and reinforce racialized depictions of the South's inhabitants and their political claims (Gramsci 1992: 144). Understanding these divisions was central to making sense of Italy's political, economic and social fractures and the very formation of Italy: '[T]hat the North was a "parasite" which enriched itself at the expense of the South, that industrial development was dependent in the impoverishment of Southern agriculture' (Gramsci 1992: 143) were central constituting features of Italy's formation and political fabric. His *Prison Notebooks* were similarly dotted with reflections on the links between the emergence of Southern regionalist mobilization as seen in Sardinia, a stronghold of emerging nationalist sentiment at the time, and the political and economic marginalization of the regions in question (see Gramsci 1971: 98; 1992: 130-135 163, 228; 2007: 326). Sardinia and the Southern question were in many ways central to Gramsci's attempts to account for the 'uneven and combined development' of the Italian 'capitalist state' (Morton 2007a: 1; Showstack Sassoon 2020: 15), drawing attention to the highly exploitative means through which the rise of the Northern bourgeoisie was established. Sardism itself was regarded by Gramsci as symptomatic of this unevenness, an expression of antagonist politics organized by the Sardinian peasants away from 'the great landowners' during and after WWI (Gramsci 1992: 132).

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[33] Original: 'Potresti tu stesso scrivere qualche articolo sul movimento politico economico del proletariato sardo? O vuoi aver la bontà di incaricare qualcuno capace di farlo? Credo sia utile far conoscere la Sardegna nuova nell'alta Italia, e credo che sia anche doveroso per meglio rinsaldare la coscienza unitaria del proletariato italiano' (Gramsci in Melis 1975: 86).

[34] The Southern Question, known in Italian as 'la Questione Meridionale' refers to the North/South divide in Italy and the issue of under-development and poverty in the Southern regions of the peninsula, sometimes including the islands of Sardinia and Sicily. In Gramsci's own examinations of the Southern regions, Sardinia is often reflected on and utilised for illustrative purposes (Gramsci 1994).

Importantly, Gramsci's personal proximity to the island informed a theoretical practice described by Hall that was driven less by a desire to pursue 'abstract academic' ends and more by his role as 'a political intellectual and a socialist activist' (Hall 1986a: 5). He often signalled the importance of 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser' (Gramsci 1971: 10). This entailed analysing the conditions that had contributed to stark regional and class inequalities and building a movement that was capable of speaking to the experiences of both the proletariat and peasantry. He opened up debate amongst communist circles in Italy which had until then largely overlooked movements such as Sardinian autonomism, or Sardism, and the newly established Sardinian Action Party (PSd'Az) (Melis 1975). His well-known essay, 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question' laid out the necessity of 'taking on board' 'the Southern Question' (Gramsci 1994: 316) for the development of a unified Italian movement. Gramsci saw value in emerging groups such as the PSd'Az which formed at a time when opposition to the Fascist regime was being stifled and critics persecuted (Melis 1975). His writings on the early success of the PSd'Az showed an eagerness to utilize the 'dynamism' that had developed on the island following the return of Sardinian troops after WWI (Melis 1975: 16). Whilst eventually critical of the party's turn to fascism, he initially regarded it as a potential catalyst for the unification of the peasantry and industrial proletariat (Melis 1975; see also Sotgiu 1977).

Times have of course changed and the historical context that informed his writing has significantly altered. However, many of the problems identified by Gramsci in relation to the Southern Question are still relevant to an analysis of Sardinia today. Regional disparities continue to exist across Italy, particularly along the historic North/South divide (Pescosolido

2019)[35]. These are strongly felt in Sardinia where pejorative attitudes towards its cultural and linguistic idiosyncrasies linger in popular discourses (Carta 2014) and where unemployment and a fragile economy preserve deep and long-standing economic inequalities (Pruna 2013). As we shall see in the following chapter, Gramsci's sustained efforts to make sense of the Southern Question provides us with a useful framing for the emergence of Sardinian nationalism, aligning in many ways with Sardinian historiography which attributes the development of Sardism to the persistence of regional and class cleavages (Pala 2016).

Crucially, Gramsci's sensitivity towards the political experiences, popular beliefs, and social relations shaping life in Italy's periphery, contributed to the development of an approach to the study of politics that gave weight to the significance of culture, civil society, common sense, language in the formation and sustenance of national projects. As the following sections show, he rejected a clear ontological separation of material relations/conditions and meaning-making, giving weight to a triad of structuring relations: material, social and discursive, and attributed political significance to the terms we use as well as their embeddedness within historical conditions. In a study that aims to give weight to the varying ways in which minority nationalists understand sovereignty, an appreciation of the mutually constitutive connections between the languages, ideas and values we use and the materials conditions and relations underpinning political configurations is crucial in developing an approach that situates sovereignty claims within a complex context of political struggle. Such a framing avoids minimizing the significance of a longer history of economic exploitation and cultural marginalization that has contributed to the formation of Sardinian nationalism whilst giving space to a non-reductionist consideration of why terms like sovereignty hold such significance amongst activists. Far from representing neutral categories or principles, a Gramscian approach politicizes terms such as sovereignty as indicators not only of struggles past and present but of the very possibilities available to them.

3.3 Structure + Superstructure

A witness to and victim of Fascism's frightening rise, Gramsci's most famous body of work, the *Prison Notebooks* (1971; 1992; 1996; 2007) were produced in miserable conditions of incarceration and illness. Imprisoned at the height of Fascism's dominance in Italy[36], the notebooks grappled with the failures of the socialist movement (Hall 1986a). The ongoing successes of Fascism and the capitalist state (Gramsci 1971: 119-120) required a shift in political strategy that moved away from the certainties and 'deterministic' analyses of historical materialist accounts[37] that were unable to capture the political dynamics he was witnessing (Gramsci 1971: 408). What emerged was a series of writings that amongst other things attempted to account for the unravelling of events that did not conform to neat prescriptions and presumed interests of the 'working classes' (Hall 1986a: 14-15) and which problematized the often taken-for-granted relationship between the so-called 'superstructure' and 'structure'[38] (Gramsci 1971: 365). This was 'the crucial problem of historical materialism' Gramsci would state (1996: 177), and one which would form the basis of his rejection of accounts that treated the superstructure, i.e. the political and ideological structures of a society, as a simple effect of economic structures (Gramsci 1971: 366, 407) i.e. the forces and relations of production. For Gramsci such approaches made the error of regarding 'superstructural' elements such as 'ideologies' as '"pure" appearance, useless, stupid' and distinct from the structure' (Gramsci 1971: 376). More worryingly, they resulted in 'vulgar' readings (Gramsci 1971: 407) that could not account for *how* the political manifested in practice nor the ways in which forces managed to attain and maintain power, much less the political significance of 'popular convictions' as productive forces (Gramsci 1971: 377).

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[35] The Italian National Institute of Statistics, (ISTAT 2017a 2017b) has published a range of data that shows the continuation of regional disparities across Italian regions largely along the North/South divide which can be accessed via https://www.istat.it/. Notable examples include data collected for EUROSTAT in 2015 on conditions of life that shows that the average net income of families in the North-West of Italy is €32,680, in the North-East €33,852, in the South €25,206, and in the islands (Sicily and Sardinia) €23,014. Data accessed via http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?QueryId=22919. Families living in 'relative poverty' account for 5.5% in Lombardy, 6.8% in Piedmont, 8.2% in Lazio, whereas they account for a staggering 35.3% in Calabria, 24.4% in Campania, 29% in Sicily, and a lower but still substantial 17.3% in Sardinia. Data collected in 2017 and can be accessed via http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?QueryId=17968.

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[36] When imprisoned the prosecutor famously stated: 'We must prevent this brain from functioning for 20 years' (Morton 2007: 3).

[37] See notes on historical materialism, in particular Gramsci's reflections on the work of Nikolai Bukharin where he critiques Marxist determinist and ahistorical analyses (Gramsci 1971 376; 407; 419-452).

[38] The distinction between superstructure/structure or superstructure/base has been a central issue in Marxist debate as shown by scholars such as Edara (2016). Marx's preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy* famously distinguished between the economic structure and superstructures which include legal, political, social and spiritual elements: 'In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed' (Marx 1904: author's preface, para. 4). The base or structure has widely referred to the relations of production or mode of production, and the superstructure to politics, law, religion, art, philosophy and ideology. For notable texts that problematize the distinction see Eagleton (2000), Harman (1986), Williams (1973), Wood (1995).

Throughout the course of the notebooks he developed a conceptualization of the structure/superstructure distinction that regarded them less as distinguishable spheres and more as mutually defining, as dialectically related (Thomas 2009a: 96-97)[39]. Ideological superstructures and 'political superstructures' such as the juridical system, government, the Church (Showstack Sassoon 2020: 112) were increasingly understood as being necessarily interconnected with material means and the relations of production. In the words of Cox:

> 'ideas have to be understood in relation to material circumstances. Material circumstances include both the social relations and the physical means of production. Superstructures of ideology and political organization shape the development of both aspects of production and are shaped by them' (Cox 1983: 168).

The key to being able to understand existing political conditions lay in stressing the 'material structure of *society'* (Gramsci 1996: 154). Production continues to be crucial, playing a pivotal role in collective ways of seeing that accompany and legitimize distributions of power. The crucial focal point here, however, is not just materiality but the '*relational'* dimension of production and meaning-making (Hall 1986a: 14). As Filippini points out: 'Gramsci does not see society as a 'middle' ground […], but the place where the principles of order, as well as the revolutionary potential of these levels, are created' (Filippini 2017: Chapter 4, para 2).

As a committed political activist interested above all in transforming the world (Crehan 2002: Chapter 4, para. 1), Gramsci's regular rejection of a clear binary between ideas and material structures went hand-in-hand with an equally important emphasis on our capacities as productive actors who sustain and/or contest social conditions. His frustrations with 'vulgar' or mechanistic readings lay in a failure to consider people as not simple receptors of false consciousness, self-contained motors of production but as active producers in the world. Such frustrations manifested in extensive discussions about ideology, philosophy, popular culture, language, literature, the press, law, art as important means through which political elites, subaltern forces and we as researchers not only apprehend the world but also question and change it (e.g. Gramsci 1971: 330-331). A simple causal relationship drawn between structure and superstructure raised similar problems as those outlined in our discussions of realist approaches to sovereignty, namely, it produced culturally flattening depictions of politics, the state and beyond. It underplayed the political significance of the production of meaning itself. Consciousness of the historicity of thinking, being and becoming was a catalyst for radical change, enabling a process of self-reflection and self-criticism which stemmed from the acknowledgement of our positionality and hence our capacities to modify the world. Ideas, customs, traditions, and so forth were regarded by Gramsci as important because 'men acquire consciousness of structural conflicts on the level of ideologies' (Gramsci 1971: 365) and because they are intrinsic to the very constitution of the political as ways in which the latter is consolidated, maintained, resisted, and more crucially, *lived*.

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[39] For an example of this approach see Gramsci 1996: 154.

Much like the critical IR scholars considered previously, Gramsci brought to the fore important questions surrounding the production or *doing* of research that highlighted the significance of being reflexive of our own positionality as actors in the reproduction of political relations (Hall 1986a). Critical research that aimed to create avenues for change entailed a particular way of doing research; a reflexive approach that required '"knowing thyself" as a product of the historical process' (Gramsci 1971: 324). He maintained that the philosopher 'cannot evade the present terrain of contradictions; he cannot affirm-other than generically- a world free of contradictions without immediately creating a utopia' (Gramsci 1996: 195). Discussing the strengths of historical materialist approaches over Hegelian idealism, Gramsci noted:

> 'even historical materialism is an expression of historical contradictions [...] it is full of consciousness of contradictions, the consciousness wherein the philosopher himself, understood both as an individual and as a social group, not only understands contradictions but posits himself as an element of the contradiction and raises this element to a principle of politics and action' (Gramsci 1996: 195).

In order for historical materialism to effect change, it was necessary that it stem from an approach that appreciated the 'partiality' (Thomas 2009a: 253) of our experiences and was acutely cognisant of the political significance of the various ways in which we experience and make sense of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Activists needed to be aware of historical materialism's situation within a material present that was not 'identical with itself but fractured by residual formations from past and emergent formations orientated to new social practices' (Thomas 2009a: 282). Theory is a reflection of inherited ways of viewing the world but is also continuously changing, responding to new junctures.

Indeed, the materially embedded nature of ideology signalled Marxism's central challenges: the sturdy roots of capitalist exploitation, which were not only found in relations of production but in the ways in which people saw them (Showstack Sassoon 2020: 182). Popular discourses, for instance, were not only reflective of a longer history of social practice and political struggle but as such were also optimal for the analysis of the effectiveness of political and economic projects. A relational approach that unpacked the processes of 'sedimentation' (Gramsci 1971: 326) of traditions and ideologies was central to giving shape to socially embedded or 'organic' political projects i.e. which were 'structural, long-term or relatively permanent' (Cox 1983: 169). As succinctly summarized by Cox, the 'strength of Gramsci's historicism' lay in an approach that 'brought' concepts, theories, ideas, etc., 'into contact with a particular situation which it helped to explain' (Cox 1983: 162). Such an approach was crucial in not only being able to make sense of the world but in our capacity to form viable political alternatives.

Tied to this relational approach was his differentiation between different 'levels of ideology' such as 'folklore', 'religion' 'common sense', and 'philosophy' that captured the various ways in which ideas and conceptions of the world are situated (Filippini 2017: Chapter 1, para. 3). He critiqued disparaging attitudes towards folklore, arguing instead for a more 'serious' engagement with it as a reflection of the historic roots of world views that continue to shape beliefs and customs (see Gramsci 1992: 186-187). His well-known conceptualization of 'common sense' similarly denoted the inherited beliefs we acquire through being in the world and that continue to have practical value in our day-to-day exchanges (Gramsci 1971: 323-324). It was symbolic of our historical situation, formed over time and reflecting the absorption of different 'historically effective' 'philosophical currents' that manage to embed themselves in communal ways of thinking (Hall and O'Shea 2013: 10-11).

His use of the term ideology whilst more difficult to pinpoint, similarly revolved around an attempt to draw attention to its complexities as a 'non-linear object, composed of different parts and several elements' (Filippini 2017 Chapter 1, para. 15). In its 'highest form', Gramsci describes it as: 'a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life' (Gramsci 1971: 328). The term philosophy sometimes referred to class and intellectual 'conceptions of the world' (Thomas 2009a: 287) or to a more systematized critical form of thinking that focused precisely on '[raising] the level of awareness of historical determination' (Thomas 2009a: 280).

Gramsci's relational approach was also marked in his discussions about language and culture. Kate Crehan's instructive analysis notes that culture in Gramsci's writings was not treated as bounded nor distinct, but rather changing, understood as 'thought in action, as a means by which people are able actively to understand their place within the reality within which they live' (Crehan 2002: Chapter 4; para. 7). Culture is inhabited, felt, personalized as well as historically situated and socially inherited. Similarly, as shown by the likes of Carlucci (2013), Ives (2004; 2005), Lo Piparo (1979), and Showstack Sassoon (1990), Gramsci's politics were in many ways ‘indivisible’ from his study of language (Carlucci 2013: 2) with the latter playing a highly influential role in the kind of approach he adopted towards critical analysis and shaping his well-known formulations of concepts such as ‘hegemony’ which we will consider shortly. A previous linguistics student, Gramsci regarded language as intricately connected to how we think about and make sense of the world (Gramsci 1996: 69, 159; 1971: 323). Importantly as argued by Peter Ives, he treated language as a ‘system’ that was not the product of a straightforward labelling process where words come to neatly refer to an external object or idea (Ives 2004: Chap. 3, section 9, para. 1). Rather, much like ideologies, language needed to be historicized, understood as being shaped by inherited grammars (Gramsci 1935): ‘language is a living thing and simultaneously a museum of fossils of past life’ (Gramsci 1996: 159).

It is important to note that Gramsci’s rejection of the view of language as labelling did not mean he saw language as free-floating, detached from material conditions. Rather, it tied in with his insistence on a consideration of the material structures of society. Language is materially constituted in so far as it is expressed between people in particular historical moments and contributes to the development and establishment of material practices and relations. Indeed, Gramsci saw language as inherently political, contributing to the formation of collective structures through which social forces exert power (Ives 2004). His distinction between ‘spontaneous’ or ‘immanent grammars’ and ‘normative grammars’ for instance (Ives 2004: Chapter 3, section 10), drew attention to the political nature of language formation. Spontaneous grammar like common sense, referred to the unconscious rules we absorb and use to communicate, a reflection of socially learnt or acquired practices. Whereas normative grammar referred to the ways in which language is regulated, legitimated, and organized in our exchanges; the ‘whole complex of actions and reactions [that] come together to create a grammatical conformism, to establish ‘norms’ or judgements of correctness and incorrectness’ (Gramsci as quoted in Ives 2004, Chapter 3, section 12). Language was the mechanism through which we create meaning, partake in shared understandings and as such integral to the practice of political action: ‘for Gramsci language is both an element in the exercise of power and a metaphor for how power operates’ (Ives 2004: Chapter 3, section 16).

We can see a correlation between Gramsci’s focus on the politicization of meaning-making and post-structuralist approaches that have focused on ‘discourse’ as the central mediating means through which not only signification but the ‘political’ itself is apprehended and established[40]. A particularly influential example of Gramsci's use in discourse-focused approaches can be found in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2017) where they argue that Gramsci's concept of hegemony marked an important departure from the determinism of class-based analyses. Drawing from a very different Saussurean approach that emphasized the non-fixity of signification as a 'differential' practice in which 'something is what it is only through its differential relation to something else' (Laclau 2005: 68), Laclau and Mouffe drew from Gramsci's writings to develop a 'post-Marxist' approach to the study of political formation that problematized structural necessity and the historical primacy of class relations. They argued that Gramsci's insistence on the political significance of the study and development of discourses that are 'embodied in institutions and apparatuses' (Laclau & Mouffe 2017: 57) was significant because it focused on the contingency of conceptualizations of the 'political' as a constructed and partial signifier. For Laclau and Mouffe such an approach marked an important shift, destabilizing the so-called objectivity or universality of discourses as means through which we create notions of political necessity to the exclusion of others. Gramsci questioned the givenness of what we are told politics is, politicizing meaning-making as active and ever-transforming expressions of political struggle. As Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1980: 9) stressed: "Gramsci always maintained a particularly sharp feeling for the ideological and material plurality of language, for what Roland Barthes has called 'the density of language'".

Gramsci's problematization of meaning-making in this sense echoes the calls made by critical IR scholars that we considered previously who have drawn attention to the reductionist implications of positivist approaches to IR and who have politicized theory as a discursive practice through which particular stories of international politics get told over others. It is perhaps not surprising then that Gramsci's work has proved an important source of inspiration in attempts to develop critical approaches to IR. Such an influence is particularly marked in the work of Cox[41] who drew extensively from Gramsci's writings in his attempt to develop an analytical framework capable of questioning 'the prevailing order' whilst giving due attention to the interconnections between 'ideas', 'material capabilities' and 'institutions' (Cox 1981: 136) through which political power was established and maintained. Gramsci's work provided a conceptual richness to the analysis of political power as manifest 'through structures of society, economy, culture, gender, ethnicity, class and ideology' (Bieler & Morton 2004: 87), drawing attention to the situatedness and historicity of ideas and language, as well as their intricate dialectical interconnections with social relations of production. We can draw parallels between Gramsci's reflections on the production of theory, the givenness of our position as researchers, and the importance of giving voice to an array of forces beyond state elites with the discussions contesting realist discourses of sovereign power. In a similar vein to Ashley's critique of sovereignty's reification in IR, we see in the attention Gramsci paid to the dialectical relationship between structure and superstructure, a desire to stress the importance of 'practice', namely, 'the moment at which men and women enter with greater or lesser degrees of consciousness into the making of their world' (Ashley 1984: 258).

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[40] Another influential strand of scholarship is Critical Discourse Analysis, see Fairclough 2010.

[41] See also Apeldoorn 2004; Bieler & Morton 2004, 2008; Gill 1993; 2008; Jessop 1982 & 2008; Morton 2003b, 2007a; Rupert 1993; Pijl 1998.

3.4 Building State Horizons

The contribution of Gramsci's problematization of meaning-making and the structure/superstructure distinction, however, lies not only in his reflections on the ontologies and epistemologies informing historical materialist analysis per se, but rather in his linkage of these concerns to an examination of more concrete considerations related to political strategy and, crucially, the role and influence of the state. His sensitivity towards the political nature of language, philosophy, ideology, culture was intimately tied to his attempts to understand the strength of 'bourgeois rule' (Femia 1981: 31), the maintenance and dismantling of 'advanced capitalism' (Showstack Sassoon 2020: 15; see also Gramsci 1971: 235) and the hurdles facing the socialist movement in Italy and beyond. Many of his conceptual innovations were tied to an appreciation of the extent to which the national within a broader 'international' context served as a 'nodal point of departure' in people's experience of politics and the world around them (Morton 2007a: 101). This was not to say that he believed in the givenness of clear binaries between the national and international but rather a reflection of the historical significance of the national in the framing of world politics and possibility; the extent to which the state and the sense of national cohesion represented an overarching entity enveloping conceptions of legitimacy and world ordering (Gramsci 1971: 176). Gramsci appreciated the significance of the state within this wider context of power and developed a nuanced account that went beyond 'instrumentalist' framings which regarded it as the simple mirroring of class relations and bourgeois primacy (Jessop 1982: 145-146) to one that saw it as a political configuration that was 'capillary' (Morton 2007a: 92-93), diffused throughout society in the 'values' and 'norms of practical behaviour' (Femia 1981: 3). For Gramsci the state played an important 'ethical-political' role (Gramsci 1971: 160; see also 2007: 20) in the development of complex superstructures and 'conceptions of the world' (Gramsci 1971: 267). The state was 'ethical' insofar as it '[raised] the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level' (Gramsci 1971: 258). It played an 'educative' role through which it 'cultivated' 'civilisations' and the 'morality of the broadest popular masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production' (Gramsci 1971: 242).

This contributed to the development of an approach to the state and politics more generally, that was interested in bringing the complexities of the embeddedness of political power to the fore as manifest not only in the governmental configuration of states but in daily exchanges, civil society, in shared 'myths' of collective belonging (Augelli & Murphy 1997). It did not abandon the significance of capital and its uneven distribution nor the question of the 'who' and 'why' of political relations which were vital in the possibility of forming a successful socialist alternative (Morton and Bieler 2008: 104) and in accounting for the partiality inherent in ideologies and discourses of power. Rather, a major emphasis was on the need to place weight on custom, discourses of legitimacy and national origins and the concrete actions of elite and subaltern forces in the maintenance and contestation of political and economic conditions. The 'relationship between State and society' was a recurring theme in Gramsci's fragmentary notes (Showstack Sassoon 2020: 110), representing a concrete manifestation of the dialectical relationship between structure and superstructure and is where his contributions to Marxist theory are particularly marked (see Jessop 1982). Gramsci developed a conceptualization of the state that went beyond 'specific institutions and apparatuses' to an approach that '[related] them to their social bases' within both political and civil society (Jessop 1982: 146). His well-known formulation of the 'integral state' (Gramsci 1971: 267) characterized as 'State = political society + civil society' (Gramsci 1971: 263) painted a complex picture of the scope of its political and social influence. In the words of Morton 'the state was not conceived as a thing in itself, or as a rational absolute, that was extraneous to individuals in a reified or fetishistic sense' (Morton 2007a: 89).

Much like his attempts to problematize a clear separation between structure and superstructure, Gramsci's focus on both forms of society had less to do with establishing clear demarcations between them and more with bringing their mutual definition to light (Showstack Sassoon 2020: 113). The distinction between political and civil societies served to 'expand' understandings of the realm of the state '[exposing] the mechanisms and modulations of power in capitalist states' (Buttigieg 1995: 3) and the ways in which 'government' *and* the so-called 'private sector', 'mutually reinforce each other to the advantage of certain strata, groups, and institutions' (Buttigieg 1995: 6). Civil society referred to 'zones' in which 'complex superstructures' such as 'morality' and 'custom' were developed (Gramsci 1971: 195) and which lay outside of the bodies of the state proper such as the Church, the political party, the press, popular culture, literature, the role of intellectuals, and so forth. His treatment of civil society broadened its scope beyond a mere denotation of the 'private' realm of economic exchange (Gramsci 1971: 160; 265; 2007: 64) to a vital unifying component of state rule (Gramsci 1971: 52). Such an approach helped question the neutrality of the capitalist state form, noting how 'activities' '[belonging] to the domain of civil society' and 'classified as "legally neutral" […] nevertheless [exert] a collective pressure and [obtain] objective results in the form of an evolution of customs, ways of thinking and acting, morality, etc.' (Gramsci 1971: 242).

Gramsci's extended view of the state proved to be, as Buttigieg notes, one of his biggest contributions to historical materialist analysis and social research more generally (Buttigieg 1995: 1). Its significance was particularly evident in the popularity of his most well-known conceptual formulation, 'hegemony' which captured his attempts to sketch a more complex account of political power, the state and the dialectical fusion of ideas and the material basis of social relations (see Gramsci 1971: 12, 181-182; 1992: 156; 1996: 52-53, 64-65). It helped Gramsci not only mark the resilience, the 'reserves' of 'bourgeois' power (Gramsci 1992: 157) and the role of the state therein but as such, it also accounted for the strategic significance of ideologies and discourses as important means through which social forces secure their position not on brute force but in popular discourses that shaped people's imaginaries of community, custom, and legitimacy and a general state of public consent (Gramsci 1971: 80 footnote 49).

Exactly what he meant by consent is difficult to pinpoint. According to Femia it can be loosely described as a type of 'acceptance – not necessarily explicit – of the socio-political order or of certain vital aspects of that order' (Femia 1981: 37). Hegemony in this sense, referred to a form of political primacy achieved through the infiltration of 'modes of behaviour' (Cox 1983: 164) and 'characterized as a […] type of conformity: arising from some degree of *conscious attachment* to, or *agreement* with, certain core elements of the society' (Femia 1981: 37). Matt Davies describes it as a dominance rooted in an 'intensive' dimension of society, i.e. in people's self-identification with particular conditions, 'a specific and internalised "socialisation" that is expected' (Davies 1999: 23). It signalled a political order that had succeeded in developing the 'appearance […] as the natural order of things' (Cox 1992: 179) through an 'intellectual and moral leadership' that had won the minds of subaltern groups via the 'dissemination' of 'its own conception of life' (Gramsci 1992: 187). In a well-known passage, Gramsci describes the move to conditions of 'hegemony' as:

> 'the most purely political phase [that] marks the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures; it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies become "party", come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society – bringing about not only a unison of economic and

> political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle ranges not on a corporate but on a “universal” plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups’ (Gramsci 1971: 181-182).

Hegemony was symbolic of the ways in which the waging of political struggle entailed defining the ‘horizons’ and nature of politics itself, of producing a world view that could be perceived as ‘universal’ (Thomas 2009b). Raymond Williams famously encapsulated this aspect of Gramsci’s formulation in the following terms:

> ‘hegemony is not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation. It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of society to move, in most areas of their lives.’ But this is not, except in the operation of a moment of subtract analysis, in any sense a static system’ (Williams 2005: 38).

True to Gramsci’s relational approach to analysis considered previously, ‘ideas in this sense are not mere epiphenomena. They ‘are anything but arbitrary; they are real historical facts which must be combated and their nature as instruments of domination exposed […] precisely for reasons of political struggle’ (Gramsci 1995 as quoted in Morton 2007a: 92).

The strength of Gramsci’s analysis resided in the focus on the extent to which the primacy acquired by the bourgeoisie was not a mechanical response to the imposition and expansion of a capitalist market, but was a much more complex process mediated through struggles for amongst other things, the very narration or telling of this process. We can draw links here with his many discussions about the role of ‘myth’, ‘nationalism’ and the ‘national-popular’ or ‘popular-national’ in the cultivation of hegemonic political relations (Bruff 2008: 58; Gramsci 1996: 6-8, 46-47; 80-82). A term borrowed from the trade-unionist Georges Sorel, the idea of myth appeared frequently in the notebooks at times referring to ‘a political ideology expressed neither in the form of a cold utopia nor as learned theorising, but rather by a creation of concrete phantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organise its collective will’ (Gramsci 1971: 126). The creation of myths was crucial in the establishment of ‘universal’ conceptions of the world (Gramsci 1971: 129). As Hall notes: ‘the whole purpose of what Gramsci called an organic (i.e. historically effective) ideology is that it articulates into a configuration different subjects, different identities, different projects, different aspirations. It does not reflect, it *constructs* a ‘unity’ out of difference’ (Hall 2017). The construction of myth was ‘central to part of the business of political parties, an initial and fundamental phase in the formation of collective will, of making 'I', 'we'' (Augelli & Murphy 1997: 29). Tied to this, Gramsci recognized the potential of the 'people-nation' (Gramsci 1971: 418-419) and the 'national-popular' (Gramsci 1971: 130—133) and the extent to which at the nexus of hegemonic relations was a passionate element which was crucial in the capacity to mobilize populations (Gramsci 1971: 418-419). In a well-known passage he explained:

> 'One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order' (Gramsci 1971: 418).

Crucially, hegemony was by no means a fully realized moment but was 'understood as a contested, fragile, and tenuous process, rather than simply a structure or edifice, involving active struggle between a variety of 'relations of force'' (Morton 2007a: 77). It was not enough to create a convincing myth and there were limits to how universalizing a conception of the world could in practice be. Instead, hegemony was indicative of antagonisms past and present, of the constant attempt to move politics' goal posts in the direction that suited given political and economic interests. In a segment on public opinion Gramsci described the latter as the:

> 'point of contact between "civil society" and "political society", between consent and force. When the state wants to embark on an action that is not popular, it starts to create in advance the public opinion that is required [...] public opinion as we think of it today was born on the eve of the collapse of the absolutist state, that is, during the period when the new bourgeois class was engaged in the struggle for political hegemony and the conquest of power' (Gramsci 2007: 213).

His discussions on the national-popular nature of the state intimated an awareness of a tension within the capitalist parliamentary system which was forever marked by an inherent lack[42] (Sotiris 2017). This dynamic was famously encapsulated in his notion of the 'passive revolution' (1971: 59, 105, 110, 118-119) which in many ways signalled 'a decisive stage in the production of the 'hegemonic fabric of modern sovereignty' (Frosini 2012 as cited in Thomas 2013: 25), namely, the shift in power seen with the rise of the parliamentary system and capitalist state and which resulted in a curtailed popular politics and a continuous conflict between desires for revolution (radical transformation of social relations) and restoration (the maintenance of relations and absorption of progressive opposition). Many of his reflections on the national-popular emerged out of a dissatisfaction with the very failures of Italian unification while the concept of hegemony also captured the 'oxymoronic' nature of the basis of the parliamentary system as seen in Italy which on the one hand saw the emergence of legitimating discourses founded on the will of the 'people' and 'egalitarian demands for citizenship and the unitary community of the nation' (Frosini 2012: 65) and the latter's continued curtailment given the preservation of elite interests and leadership of the bourgeoisie (Frosini 2012: 65). The Italian Risorgimento represented a *passive* revolution through which elite interests were pursued and sustained at the expense of a genuine mobilization of the large subaltern populations throughout the peninsula (Gramsci 1971: 59).

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[42] See Gramsci 1996: 6-8; 46-47; 62 for some examples of his criticisms of Italian nationalism. In the latter passage he states: 'Note the fact that in many languages "national" and "popular" are almost synonymous [...] in French it has the same, but politically more developed, meaning because it is linked to the idea of "sovereignty" – national sovereignty and popular sovereignty have, or have had, the same import [...] In Italy the intellectuals are distant from the people, that is, from the "nation", and they are bound to a caste tradition, a "bookish" and abstract tradition that has never been broken by a powerful popular or national political movement'.

As this discussion shows, Gramsci did not forget the role of capital in political struggle. An appreciation of economic relations were central in being able to make sense of why and what forms of political struggle were favoured over others (Showstack Sassoon 2020: 119) and why the modern state took the form it did. Concepts such as the 'historical bloc' which referred to the alignment of 'social relations of production' and 'the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures' (Gramsci 1971: 366) for instance, evinced an insistence on the necessary interconnections between politics and relations of production. Crucially, his treatment of passive revolution was in many ways an argument about the uneven and combined development of capitalism. As contributions to IR and IPE show (Bieler & Morton 2018b; Hesketh & Morton 2014; Morton 2007a; 2007b; 2010; 2011), passive revolution captured a particular form of political and economic activity that had accompanied capitalism's development in places like Italy which prior to the Risorgimento in the 19th century was split into kingdoms and relied on a primarily agrarian economy. Pushed by an emerging bourgeoisie in Piedmont with expansionist ambitions alongside a landowning aristocracy, Italian unification for all the proclamations of its symbolizing an emancipatory project by its most ardent supporters, resulted in a situation that saw both the violent and oppressive imposition of capitalism and the continuation of a highly exploitative agrarian economy in the South. The emergent state was marked by both rupture and restoration, resulting in a transformation of conditions that were 'at once partially fulfilled and displaced' (Hesketh & Morton 2014: 150).

Moreover, this was not just a national issue for Gramsci but reflected the 'international' scope of capitalism's reach as a foundational feature of the emerging interstate system (Gramsci 1971: 176, 182). The regional and class unevenness that appeared across the peninsula was not merely a reflection of class and regional difference within Italy but was also an indication of the Northern bourgeoisie's political and economic disadvantages in the face of a wider international context of development that was seeing the turn towards centralized state power as a means through which capitalist interests could be fostered and economic competition extended (Bieler & Morton 2018b; Gramsci 1992: 228-230). In a segment where he reflects on the study of the 'relations of force' he notes:

> 'It is also necessary to take into account the fact that international relations intertwine with these internal relations of nation-states, creating new, unique and historically concrete combinations. A particular ideology, for instance, born in a highly developed country, is disseminated in less developed countries, impinging on the local interplay of combinations' (Gramsci 1971: 182).

The peculiarities he attached to cases like Italy such as its preservation of propertied class interests, the limits of its national-popular politics, and the staggered and highly unequal transformation of relations of production across regions was reflective of his appreciation of the critical role played by the state within a longer and wider (international) history of capitalist expansion (see also Gramsci 1992: 230; 1996: 61, 104-105). To borrow from Bieler and Morton's characterization of passive revolution, the Risorgimento represented 'a revolution without mass participation, or a 'revolution from above', involving elite-engineered social and political reform that [drew] on foreign capital and associated ideas while lacking a national-popular base' (Bieler & Morton 2018b: 19).

Before moving on, it is worth noting that for all Gramsci's frustrations, he nevertheless did not regard it as a deterministic situation with no hope for change. The inherent partiality within hegemonic orders and within Italy was important, indicating fissures through which viable alternatives could be established (Roccu 2017). The power of myths was not just important in processes of state formation but Gramsci maintained they were necessary for the future of the socialist cause as a means through which passion and enthusiasm could be maintained and a 'national-popular collective will' could be established (Gramsci 1971: 133). He explains: '[D]estruction and negation cannot exist without an implicit construction and affirmation – this is not in a "metaphysical" sense but in practice, i.e. politically as party programme' (Gramsci 1971: 129). In this sense, the people were regarded by Gramsci not as mere passive recipients of political order but a crucial and active force in both the sustenance of existing political relations and in the potential for revolutionary change: 'Any formation of a national-popular collective will is impossible, unless the great mass of peasant farmers bursts *simultaneously* into political life' (Gramsci 1971: 132). Tied to this was a second use of passive revolution which referred to the ways in which 'popular demands of class struggle still play some role' (Bieler & Morton 2018b: 19) and to "the fact that 'progress' occurs as the reaction of the dominant classes to the sporadic and incoherent rebelliousness of the popular masses – a reaction consisting of ‘restorations’ that agree to some part of the popular demands and are therefore ‘progressive restorations’, or ‘revolutions-restorations’, or even ‘passive revolutions’” (Gramsci 2007 as cited in Bieler & Morton 2018: 19). He saw value in myth making, as a vital component in the possible creation of a transformative movement within existing conditions of advanced capitalism[43] (Sotiris 2017). Passive revolution’s denotation of a *revolution* suggested conditions of progressive possibility, small openings or interstices through which alternative voices could be expressed in periods where there was a lack of hegemony and/or when there were few spaces through which opposition could be expressed. It reflected the messy ways in which political agents responded to the unevenness of their surroundings and carved possible spaces through which they could appeal and/or contest a given situation and the horizons of dominant/hegemonic discourses. Moreover, it accounted for the varying extent to which different class interests did not necessarily manifest in open antagonism but rather came together in processes of political alliance.

3.5 Theorizing Sovereignty

As previously indicated, Gramsci’s writings have been a central source of inspiration for critical IR and IPE literatures questioning realist discourses of political power. Robert Cox’s essay ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations theory’ gave way to a much-needed interrogation of the basis of theory as a reflection of the situatedness of theory-making (Cox 1981: 128), whilst his essay ‘Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations’ (Cox 1983) contributed to a much richer appreciation of the nature of international power and ordering beyond notions that regarded it as the simple reflection of military might and economic capacity to an approach that emphasised hegemony and the fusion of structural and superstructural forces at an international level. Where some of the greatest contributions have been made is in discussions on the significance of the state within world configurations of power as not ‘a given or pre-constituted institutional category’ but as ‘historically constructed’, a reflection of transformations in ‘social forces’ and ‘world orders’ (Morton 2007a: 117-118). Subsequent work that has incorporated Gramsci’s ideas has contributed to a ‘historicization’ of international relations as the ‘consequence of collective human activity’ (Gill 1993: 22) and not the product of abstract structural constants or class as a static analytical concept’ (Morton 2007a: 117). Crucially, this scholarship has also incorporated Gramsci’s notion of hegemony and historical bloc to examine the widespread prevalence of ways of ordering the world (Cox 1981), its dominant mode of production and penetration of state boundaries (Gill 1995). Such framings have proved useful in accounting for the rise of neo-liberalism and the transnational state, for example, and their effects on the configuration of states[44].

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[43] Particularly instructive are his reflections in Notebook 10 part 2, including note number 41v, available in Italian at: dl.gramsciproject.org.

Other notable scholarship that has drawn from Gramsci's work include post-colonial analyses of world politics (see Srivastava & Bhattacharya 2012 collection) such as Partha Chatterjee's examination of Indian nationalism which has drawn from Gramsci's concept of passive revolution to examine historic tensions within the movement between gradual, moderate molecular change from the top and radical, popular change, from the bottom (Chatterjee 1986: 46). Gramsci's conceptual formulations helped Chatterjee highlight how demands for national self-determination in India have been intricately interwoven in the uneven expansion of capitalism and colonialism in the country, a reflection of the hegemonic significance of Euro-centric expectations of political expression and legitimacy wherein Western models of state and nation continue to be essential structures and discourses in global configurations of power that favour the securing of capital. Nationalism has in this view played a double role as an expression of desires and demands for Indian emancipation and the curtailment of this struggle within boundaries that accord with capitalist interests. Chatterjee shows us that Gramsci's passive revolution is not only useful in considering the 'utility' of statehood but also of nationalism itself, as 'an [accompanying] means for the 'transformation' of the old dominant classes into partners in a new historical bloc' (Chatterjee 1986: 30), and as a way of keeping 'the contradictions between capital and the people in perpetual suspension' (Chatterjee 1986: 168)

As I aim to show in the next chapters, Gramsci's contributions to understanding the role of the state, myth, national-popular and the primacy he gave to the relational nature of political and discursive construction and identity formation provides us with a useful lens through which we can approach the study of Sardinian sovereignty claims. Whilst he did not have much to say explicitly about sovereignty[45], his formulations of hegemony, historical bloc, passive revolution and national myth, amongst others, offers a number of useful conceptual framings that enable the appreciation of a) the political implications of discourse formation, b) the social embeddedness of sovereignty claims, and c) what Raymond Williams defined as the 'intention' behind political construction (Williams 2005: 36), namely, the agencies that shape social organization and discourse formation. As seen in our previous discussion on the debates and advances made in sovereignty's theorization within IR, a sensitivity to these three issues is central in the development of reflexive approaches to the study of sovereignty claims that does not essentialize its signification in either/or terms nor diminish its embroilment in the establishment of political boundaries and material conditions evident in contemporary trends seen in minority nationalist demands for international recognition that reflect shifts in economic conditions and the role of the state therein.

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[44] See for example Apeldoorn 2004; Bieler 2005; Bruff 2014; Cutler 1999; Gill 1990; 1995; Overbeek 2004.

[45] Gramsci had little to say directly about sovereignty. In pre-prison publications his descriptions of sovereignty aligned with Marx's own writings viewing it as 'an anti-social concept' that 'envisages the 'citizen' as being locked in an eternal war with the State' (Gramsci 1994: 88). Sovereignty was understood in legal terms as a delineation of the separation of public and private spheres of political activity. Consider the following passages: 'The Constitution – that juridical fiction of the impartial and superior sovereignty of the law, voted in by the representatives of the people – was, in reality, the beginning of the dictatorship of the propertied classes, their 'legal' conquest of the supreme power of the state. Private property became a fundamental institution of the State, guaranteed and protected against both the arbitrary decisions of the sovereign and the invasions of the rural poor whose land had been expropriated […] Competition becomes enshrined as the practical foundation of human interaction: citizen-individuals are the atoms which make up the social nebula – unstable, inorganic elements which cannot adhere to any social organism […] The concept of the sovereignty of the law is based on precisely this social instability and lack of cohesion. It is a purely abstract concept, a covert trick played on the good faith and innocence of the people' (Gramsci 1994: 88). He did show some explicit interest in sovereignty in prison notes such as seen in 1971: 176; 1996: 118).

Gramsci's questioning of the neat lines between structure and superstructure, of culturally flattening accounts of politics that take class relations for granted or do not consider them at all and which dismiss subaltern forces as simple receptors of ideas and political conditions, as well as his treatment of language and ideologies as productive forces, aligns with the central objectives of this study, namely, to draw attention to the political significance of minority nationalist claims to sovereignty and the extent to which they do not merely conform to realist or statist imaginaries of power but rather represent complex mediations within existing social conditions. The adoption of a Gramscian perspective means giving weight to multiple voices in the construction of political discourses and avoiding the reproduction of elitist and reified depictions of sovereign power and international politics incapable of adequately capturing the role and significance of subaltern articulations in the construction of national, international, and state politics.

It also places emphasis on the need to ensure we situate the claims of those we encounter within a view that does not discount the material conditions shaping the possibilities of engagement. Gramsci criticized the explanatory value of approaches that simply defined people's conceptions of the world as 'bad faith' because they underplayed the connections between people's views and their necessary attachment to social conditions of expression (Gramsci 1971: 326-327). People engage with practices not simply by virtue of their coherence with a system of beliefs or interests but by virtue of the social circumstances in which they find themselves that has meant that some ideas and practices are and often have to be favoured over others. Individuals who take on precarious or exploitative labour for example, do not necessarily agree with the terms of their conditions but are often left with no other choice but to engage with them reflective of what Ian Bruff describes as 'reluctant acquiescence' (Bruff

2008: 60) and the reality that ‘we need to produce in order to satisfy our needs for food, water, shelter and so on’ (Bruff 2010a: 624). Furthermore, people might engage with particular myths not because they are in agreement with them but because they represent means through which they might express politically.

This premise is crucial in appreciating the kinds of challenges faced by minority nationalists and in our capacity to recognize why terms like sovereignty and political movements like nationalisms continue to hold significance. Indeed, as our discussion on nationalism and minority nationalisms show, activist demands for sovereignty are not made in a void but to borrow from one interviewee, in ‘the materiality of [people’s] lives’, responding to already existing and changing configurations of political and economic power and representing attempts to come to terms with the complexities of existing ‘constellations of power’ (Keating 1996: 53). Claims to statehood and sovereignty whilst much more complex than simply a reflection of a desire for clear-cut territorial boundaries and the alignment between nation and state, nevertheless indicate the continued structuring significance of states and discourses of sovereignty as ‘grammars’ of sorts that are materially embedded and which minority nationalists feel compelled to appeal and/or appeal to. A serious engagement with the nuances of minority nationalist discourse requires us to examine what it is that their claims *do* which in turn entails an appreciation of the social conditions informing their demands.

Gramsci’s notions of hegemony, passive revolution, and historical bloc are useful in this respect, providing the conceptual means through which we can approach the challenges in manoeuvre facing activists. They give weight to the structuring effects of social relations of production and draw attention to the partiality of political horizons and discourses of legitimacy. They also capture the constructedness, contingencies and fractures underpinning the state and nation and which are laid bare in minority nationalist claims that question state boundaries and narratives of unitary national identity. Gramsci’s insistence on the socially embedded nature of ideologies, philosophies and language, gives due weight to the kinds of terrains favoured by nationalist strategy which has historically relied on the use of ‘communication’ and ‘mass vernacular’ (Anderson 2006) in the creation of popular conceptions of collective belonging. Indeed, we find a similar concern in Gramsci’s work with the mythologization (Augelli & Murphy 1997) of a ‘common’ and shared past as well as the infiltration of symbols, traditions into communicative and ‘banal’ practices that can capture people’s imaginations and sense of place within a community as important political practices (Billig 1995). Moreover, his treatment of nationalism echoes scholarship that has drawn attention to the affective, passionate nature of national identity, its role in the creation of custom, tradition and a sense of community as well as its recourse to 'myth', to stories of ancient origin and the memorialization of past events, figures and places (for overviews of these debates see Coakley 2004 & Morden 2016). Indeed, scholarship on nationalisms has shown that myths have played an important part in the development of unifying narratives of collective belonging (Cattini 2015: 446) particularly at times of extensive transformation (Morden 2016: 450) due in part to their 'hybridity' i.e. their unevenness as combinations of 'reality and fiction'; their 'duality' as discourses that can both speak or operate within 'specific social and historical setting[s]' and 'assume a form of universality' (Bouchard 2013: 2-3); and finally, their affective nature as 'energizing' discourses that both preserve particular narratives from critique and catapult political action (Bouchard 2013: 2-3). The significance of national myth not only lies in its moulding of collective histories and customs but in preserving the future survival of national identity and state unity as a constitutive political relation (Smith 2010: Chap. 1, Section 2, para. 8). Much like traditions, their reproduction has aided the promotion, legitimation and establishment of 'practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature' and the '[inculcation of] certain values and norms of behaviour' (Hobsbawm 2012: 1). Myths of national belonging are very real in Gramsci's formulations, as lived and intimately connected to the experience of modern forms statehood and conditions of advanced capitalism.

Gramsci's reflections also speak to criticisms made by historical materialist and post-colonial interventions on the issue of sovereignty and IR by not removing the issue of power from analysis and obfuscating the significance of class relations, cultural exclusion, economic exploitation in the manifestation of state power and nationalist struggle. This is crucial for the present study, contributing to an approach that does not underplay the effects of class and cultural marginalization that are so central to understanding the emergence and significance of minority nationalism in Sardinia and which responds to the ongoing effects of uneven and combined development in the manifestation of the Sardinian nation question. As we shall see in chapter 4, chapter 6 and chapter 7, it is impossible to separate the emergence and intensification of Sardinian nationalism from the legacies of regional disparities across Italy and the passive nature of its inclusion and modernization within Italy. How activists spoke of the available forms of manoeuvre was intricately intertwined with a telling of Sardinia's national story as the result of the failures of the Italian national project and an awareness of the effects of economic marginalization within Italy, Europe and beyond. Moreover, it ties in with extensive nationalism scholarship that has considered how the emergence of nationalism has been both a response to the effects of capitalism's uneven development as a form of contesting transformation and absorbing it. The recent shifts in minority nationalist articulations of sovereignty as indications of a desire to catch-up to further integrate their voice beyond the state within a ‘global’ context of economic and political exchange are examples of the ties between nationalist demands for sovereignty and the unevenness in political and economic conditions. To sum up with the words of Hall, Gramsci made allowances for:

> “a world which was complexifying in front of his eyes. He saw the pluralisation of modern cultural identities, emerging between the lines of uneven historical development, and asked the question: what are the political forms through which a new cultural order could be constructed, out of this 'multiplicity of dispersed wills, these heterogeneous aims'. Given that that is what people are really like, given that there is no law that will make socialism come true, can we find forms of organisation, forms of identity, forms of allegiance, social conceptions, which can both connect with popular life and, in the same moment, transform and renovate it? Socialism will not be delivered to us through the trapdoor of history by some *deux ex machina*” (Hall 2017).

In keeping with the points here outlined, this thesis approaches Sardinian independentist demands for sovereignty in a Gramscian way, interpreting sovereignty as a form of political doing that is enmeshed in historical conditions and social relations. It moves away from binary conceptualizations of the term towards one that frames sovereignty discourses as political, productive and continuously crafted. Crucially, it also regards discourse as a means for agential expression through which people make their own meanings, reflect on the world around them and resist. The analysis also incorporates the terms here outlined, namely, hegemony, historical bloc, passive revolution, national-popular, and myth in its examination of activist claims. As we shall see in part 2 of the thesis, these provide us with particularly effective framings of activists’ discussions of their objectives and the material conditions shaping the possibilities for manoeuvre and attainment of sovereignty which were intimately tied to the ongoing legacies of dynamics of revolution/restoration in Italy, and the passive nature of national unification which went hand-in-hand with the maintenance of class and regional divides. Before moving onto part 2 and our analysis of Sardinian independentist claims, it is first necessary to outline the main methods used in the research.

3.6 Research Methods

In keeping with the absence of an in-depth examination of Sardinian independentist approaches to sovereignty and a desire to take the views of minority nationalists seriously as socially embedded and continuously contested, the research adopts an ethnographic approach to the study of Sardinian independentism. Ethnography, well-known for its encompassing a broad range of methods and objectives (Simpson 2011) focuses on immersion in the social settings we study and in the adoption of an 'inductive and open-ended' 'method' that prizes the views and values of our interlocutors (Seligman & Estes 2020).

Whilst there is a great deal of discussion within anthropology on what *exactly* ethnography entails, Schatz argues that there are nevertheless two important features of ethnographic research; namely, the use of 'participant observation' which entails 'immersion in a community, a cohort, a locale, or cluster of related subject positions' and the adoption of a particular 'sensibility', 'an approach that cares […] to glean the meanings that people under study attribute to their social and political reality' (Schatz 2013: 5). One of the strengths of ethnography is the way in which it lends itself to a reflective and 'dialectic' research process where the researcher is invited to 'react' to the social context he or she is immersed in (Agar 1980: 9) whilst simultaneously reflect on their position in the production of research (Scott-Jones & Watt 2010).

The use of ethnography has been increasing in IR following an 'ethnographic turn' (Lie 2013: 201) in the discipline over the past couple of decades and the move towards 'practice' focused forms of research (MacKay & Levin 2015: 167) that 'problematize' 'state-centric' 'top-down' studies of world politics in favour of the analysis of 'everyday bottom-up' practices and experiences (Montsion 2018: 2). In the case of the present study, the adoption of ethnographic methods facilitated an approach to data collection that was dynamic and 'iterative' (Kapiszewski, Mclean & Reed 2015: 22) which was important for the development of a flexible account that could respond to possible changes in conditions and resources available in the field and the minimization of a prescriptive approach to activist views. This iterative process was central in my ability to question assumptions I was bringing to the field and in the problematization of the concept of sovereignty which stemmed from the often-unexpected response to the concept amongst activists.

We can draw important parallels between the motivations driving ethnographic approaches and the Gramscian perspective outlined here, namely, the emphasis on the treatment of those we engage with not as objects or subjects of study but collaborators and interlocutors, a focus on the situatedness or relationality of ideas and social forces in complex social relations that are materially, ideologically, culturally and discursively formulated, and a critical approach to research that acknowledges the human actions and interventions of the researcher him/herself within the field (Simpson 2011). As Crehan notes in her analysis of the contributions a turn to Gramsci can make to Anthropology, there is a notable correlation between ethnographic research and his 'insistence that we take seriously the complexity and specificity of the cultural worlds different people inhabit – and pay serious attention to their own mappings of those worlds' (Crehan 2002: Chap. 1, section 2, para. 7).

Fieldwork conducted in Sardinia between October 2017 and June 2018 comprised a range of methods including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, social media networking, document collection and analysis, and secondary research in regional libraries and online. The central aim guiding the methods used was to ensure I gained access to a broad range of views, developed a sense of the kinds of activities activists took part in and the general topography of the movement, namely, the social relations, factions, parties and actors shaping Sardinian independentism. During this time I engaged with activists from parties and collectives such as the PSd'Az, Partito dei Sardi (PdS), Red Moors (RM), Progetu Repùblica de Sardigna (ProgRES), Sa Domu (SD), Unidos, A Foras (AF), Caminera Noa (CN), Movimento Zona Franca (MZF), Sardigna Natzione Indipendentzia (SNI), Sardegna Libera (SL), (LibeRU), Indipendèntzia Repùbrica de Sardigna (IRS), SARDOS, and non-party aligned activists involved in initiatives such as Bixinau and the Sardinian Trade Union movement Confederazione Sindacale Sarda (CSS). An engagement with daily expressions of activism was central to developing an account that gave credence to activist demands and which could provide an accurate depiction of mobilization and the ways in which independentists used terms like sovereignty. It enabled me to gauge unspoken differences between activists, disagreements and agreements on issues, important overlaps which often went unaccounted for when simply relying on party published documents online, for example. My time in the field also enabled access to written material regularly published by activists, such as leaflets, zines, posters, which I would not have been able to access from afar and which provided valuable information regarding the continuous work being done by activists such as seminars on Sardinian history, guided tours in the territory and investigative research on the economy, history and culture. It increased my exposure to unforeseen factors informing activists' demands through invitations to cross-party events and meetings on issues such as the environment, anti-militarism, and linguistic workshops. By gaining access to a variety of platforms through which activists regularly exchanged ideas and engaged, I was able to develop a sense of cross-party convergences and alliances on issues as well as stark tensions between factions. Crucially, it gave me an idea of the movement's *movement* and the ways in which it was in continuous development.

Alternative interlocutors in the way of non-activists were also considered for the project. Whilst in the field I encountered a large number of people who were supportive and interested in the independence cause but who were not politically active in the movement. However, I decided to not include them after noticing a reluctance to being interviewed and participating in the research. Most of the non-activist sympathisers I engaged with expressed reservations about commenting on the case and representing other independentists. Importantly, given the research sought to examine Sardinian independentist attitudes to sovereignty, focusing on the views of self-defined political activists was the surest way I could accurately capture the main approaches to sovereignty within the movement at the time. I made concerted efforts to document the views of a wide range of activists from across the political spectrum to ensure the findings reflected the varying ways in which activists engaged with the issues at hand.

3.6.1 Participant Observation

In line with ethnographic research's focus on acquiring insights into the everyday life, 'activities, people and physical aspects' of the case being studied (Spradley 1980: 54), I conducted participant observation. For the duration of my time in Sardinia I kept a diary and fieldnotes which I updated regularly and where I reported my impressions of surroundings, exchanges with activists, events and reflected on the research process, limits, key findings, and relevant points of interest for further examination. They proved particularly useful in identifying patterns in activist accounts as well as the production of 'thick description' i.e. on the presentation of the context and intentions behind social actions, and on '[capturing] the thoughts and feelings of participants as well as the often complex web of relationships among them' (Ponterotto 2006: 543). The notes incorporated in the thesis help to situate activist accounts within events happening at the time and provide a sense of how pervasive certain attitudes amongst activists were. The recording of notes and entries was done on the basis of what was happening around me as well as permission granted by gatekeepers and activists from different groups including the PSd'Az, PA and AF, and covered a range of events organized by activists such as press conferences, seminars, organizational meetings, rallies and marches, descriptions of my environment and the conditions that seemed to influence mobilization.

Crucially, the notebooks and diaries also provided a space for me to frequently reflect on my own positionality as a researcher and address the issue of reflexivity. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) define reflexivity as the idea that:

> 'The orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them. What this represents is a rejection of the idea that social research is, or can be, carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the biography of the researcher, in such a way that its findings can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 15).

Whilst we cannot completely separate ourselves from our embodiment of particular histories, values and interests, we can help to minimize the issue of bias through a continuous and active engagement with the effects of our position within the field. Analysis of fieldnotes and diaries enabled me to identify limits in my observations, to take stock of what I had encountered and the need to ensure I was being generous towards interlocutors even if I did not agree with their positions. Examples of this reflexive approach can be found in passages such as the following extract where I reflect on a widespread sense that people felt detached from the movement and on the need to consider the influence of this dynamic on sovereignty's usage:

> 'As I get more immersed into the main debates that are currently taking place in Sardinia, the more I feel that there is a great deal of work that needs to be done from the nationalists' point of view in creating strong relationships with 'ordinary' people. There is a widespread perception that independentism and nationalism don't result in anything, it is fantasy, and people seem to be tired of hearing about it. I wonder where this comes from? […] This fragmentation is significant, especially for my study of the notion of sovereignty as it serves to highlight the political struggles that give way to its definitions and uses. These divisions are indicative of the various ways in which groups co-opt or use certain terms that have an emotive appeal in order to further particular aims or claims'.

It must be noted, however, that the bulk of the material used in the thesis comes from interviews as opposed to the fieldnotes themselves. The decision to primarily focus on interview material was made in order to protect the identity of participants. Despite being a highly fractured movement, it was apparent that activists were very familiar with one another. Given the sensitivity of the material which often contained detailed and identifiable information on activists' views and feelings about the movement, it was crucial I maximized the anonymity of those I engaged with where possible. I have included some field impressions in my discussion in order to provide useful contextual information that helps situate activist approaches to sovereignty within a broader tapestry of conditions, however, these have been included in ways that prioritize the protection of my interlocutors.

3.6.2 Interviews

As indicated above, in addition to keeping detailed fieldnotes I also conducted 37 semi-structured interviews in order to draw out more focused responses to the issue of sovereignty. Interview data helped to glean differences and similarities in activists' interpretations of sovereignty and how they related it to broader concerns with the movement, its aims and challenges, more explicitly. I chose to adopt a semi-structured approach to the majority of interviews and prepared a series of questions I wanted to ensure activists responded to in advance. The semi-structured approach allowed for activists to respond to questions as they saw fit and gave me space to prompt particular points that were unclear and required further elaboration as well as build a rapport with activists. Interviews lasted anywhere between 20 minutes to a couple of hours and questions varied depending on how activists responded to the questions as activists sometimes inadvertently answered questions that I had prepared. The common questions posed to activists in all interviews were: 'How would you define sovereignty?' and 'What are principal obstacles facing the movement today?' Interviews also began with me asking respondents for some background information on their activism, how and why they got involved in the movement. Selection of these open-ended questions was made in order to explicitly examine activist interpretations of sovereignty, the main objectives shaping their activism, and how they situated the term within their approaches to the issue of Sardinian national independence more broadly. Interviewees often asked me questions about my own views on the issue at hand and whilst I sought to maintain the focus of interviews on their views, responding to their questions in a more conversational manner often helped to produce more relaxed interviews and build a rapport with activists.

Information acquired through the interviews proved tremendously significant in my understanding of activist approaches to sovereignty, helping me appreciate the ways in which activists problematized the term. The interviews often provided vivid accounts of activists' political trajectories, their frustrations with the movement, and visions for the future. They gave agency to activists, pointing to the ungivenness of sovereignty amongst some, the ways in which they questioned conventional binary formulations and actively embedded the issue of discursive selection within wider concerns surrounding what Sardinian independentism could and should entail. It was primarily through my interview discussions that the complex entanglements between the issue of Sardinian independence, sovereignty and class antagonisms emerged.

Most of the interviews were conducted in Italian, with a couple done in Sard at the request of my interviewees. I recorded the majority of interviews and with some exceptions took notes. The latter was done when interviews occurred spontaneously, or interviewees had selected noisy locations or at interviewee request. On these occasions I transcribed my notes soon afterwards in order to ensure the information was presented as accurately as possible. Where an interviewee and myself could not feasibly arrange an interview in person, we did it via telephone which often hindered my ability to get a sense of activists' body language and response and often required greater prompts for clarification. Interview response on the whole was positive, activists were in the main happy to help and very generous with their time and thoughts. There were a couple of instances where I struggled to establish a positive rapport with activists reluctant to go into much depth or deviate from the party line. I reflected on my approach in interviews and adjusted my questions depending on how receptive respondents were to a particular issue. I began the interviews with an introduction of the aims of the study, the use of the data and made clear to them that they could withdraw involvement and consent if they saw fit. To ensure interviewee safeguarding I also guaranteed anonymity. Whilst written consent was not always possible, verbal consent was acquired and I supplied contact details to all interviewees to allow them to contact me following the interviews. I transcribed and analysed interviews through NVivo, which not only provided a secure platform on which I could deposit all my transcripts but also organize the data, identify running themes across interviews which proved very useful in establishing differences and similarities around sovereignty's signification amongst activists as well as reflect on fieldnotes. Theme selection took an iterative form. Interview transcripts were initially individually analysed and then compared on the basis of the ways in which activists defined and framed sovereignty and answered particular questions. The aim was not to determine set categories but rather to facilitate comparison.

3.6.3 Access and Selection

The majority of the research was conducted in the regional capital of Cagliari. I chose the city as my main base given its transport links, size and political prominence. Cagliari is home to the Regional Council and most parties have an office in the city. Moreover, the city also offered greater access than other cities to the regional library catalogue through many libraries such as the Emilio Lussu Provincial library, the Regional Library and the General Communal and Sardinian Studies Library. Access to these resources was crucial given the lack of Sardinian and Italian secondary material on the movement in the UK necessary for developing an understanding of the movement's origins, central features of Sardinian politics and economy more generally, and the current state of existing scholarship on the topic. As chapter 4 shows, these resources were vital in acquiring an overview of the significance attributed to historic fractures within Italy in the aggravation of the Sardinian national question.

Sardinia's poor transport infrastructure and Cagliari's location in the Southern coast of the island nevertheless did minimize my engagement with independentist collectives and events based in other areas of the island. Where possible, I tried to go to other small towns such as Bauladu in central Sardinia which often held cross-party events and where I was invited by activists to attend. As I would come to learn, many of these locations were central meeting points for activists across the island, particularly the small village of Bauladu due to its central location in the island. Attending these events was hugely valuable in enabling me to appreciate issues that brought activists together such as the anti-militarist A Foras collective, anti-nuclear waste protests and important pressure groups focused on more specific issues tied to agricultural, energy and health sectors.

Given the highly fractured nature of the movement into a number of different parties and the extensive number of non-party aligned activists, I chose to access as many activists from different parties and factions as possible. Initially divisions between parties and more informal factions were not always clear to me, however, as time went on and I became more familiar with activists I broadened my engagement to participants from across parties and collectives. Confining the research to one party would have not captured these important dynamics and would have also created potential tensions amongst participants who I chose to speak to. One interviewee towards the end of my fieldwork asked me why I had decided to speak to her so far into the project. Others frequently asked me who I had spoken to and it was apparent that for many of those I interviewed, my reaching out to various parties in order to get a sense of the breadth of different views and approaches was important. The interviews conducted included regional government officials, party representatives, town mayors, organizers, and cultural workers such as language specialists and historians.

Access was primarily secured through snowballing techniques, networking at events and gatekeepers. The majority of the events attended and contacts developed were facilitated by gatekeepers of parties and cultural organizations that were not necessarily party-aligned such as Sardinian language schools and language activists. A somewhat serendipitous facilitator of access came from language training. Prior to starting the fieldwork, I undertook Sard lessons in order to be able to access party documents which were increasingly being produced in Sard. Looking back, learning Sard became one of the central means through which I established contacts in the field as many of the people involved in the preservation of Sard identified as independentists. Activists were often encouraged when they learnt that I was learning Sard as it demonstrated commitment and a genuine interest in Sardinia and I was interviewed by the regional paper the Unione Sarda which significantly increased my exposure (see Appendix B). Social media sites such as Facebook also proved particularly useful in seeing what was happening as events were frequently advertised by parties and collectives on the site. It also facilitated initial contact with activists as well as maintain contact with them afterwards. I was conscious of not over relying on what was available online, however, as access to internet as well as what people post is limited (Seligmann & Estes 2020: 181).

My status as a young female researcher presented a range of challenges to access. On the one hand, I sometimes struggled to be taken seriously by activists, on the other, my young age and status as a ‘foreigner’ also meant activists frequently made an effort to explain things to me. Access to female activists also proved much more difficult as many of those approached were less inclined to be interviewed or to take part in the project. I subsequently learnt that this was a reflection of broader complex gender relations in Sardinia, an issue that lay beyond the scope of the present study but which certainly merits its own investigation. Indeed, I found that women often worked behind the scenes, with most representatives and officials being men. In order to mitigate against this issue, I actively reached out to more women through more informal exchanges and on some occasions through formal interviews where I explained my interest in getting a better sense of women's views.

3.6.4 Data Management and Ethical Considerations

How I protected participants was of crucial significance. As stated above, whilst the thesis does not deal with topics that could potentially place respondents at direct risk of harm, the notoriety of activists and the closeness of the movement where everyone knows everyone as well as the highly divided and fractured nature of relations between activists meant that the anonymization of activist accounts was the surest way of safeguarding participants. Notes included in the thesis have been anonymized where possible and I have used pseudonyms for interviewees to protect their identities. The project also underwent a rigorous ethical review by the University of Newcastle prior to conducting the fieldwork. Data was anonymized and adherence to the American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics was followed as closely as possible in order to ensure transparency and informed consent (American Anthropological Association 2012).

Focus now turns to the empirical part of the thesis. As we shall see, the aim has not been to provide a definitive account of activist approaches to sovereignty but to provide a snapshot of their formulations of sovereignty and an initial exploration of some central themes that emerged from my exchanges and time in Sardinia. In keeping with both the Gramscian and ethnographic approaches outlined, the analysis seeks to bring their interpretations of sovereignty to the fore, but more importantly, to give space to the ways in which they themselves viewed the 'political situations in which they are involved' as agents of political change (Bayard de Volo & Schatz 2004: 268).

Part 2

Chapter 4: The Sardinian Question

> ‘Travelling from the Golfo degli Aranci to Cagliari some old shepherd still points to hills of naked granite shining in the scorching sun and remembers the time when they were covered in forests and pasture; the torrential rain after the deforestation had brought to the surface and to the sea the useful coat of earth’[46] (own translation of Gramsci 1918 in Melis 1975: 89).
>
> ‘Sardinia’s remoteness from Europe – the centre of history – was not so much physical as imaginative and representational, given the geographical proximity of the island to Europe. Historically, the world outside the island has played an important role as the dominant purveyor, arbiter and owner of meanings about Sardinia, an island with a tortuous relationship with Europe. In fact, as an exotic borderland, Sardinia has a special place in the history of European experience and myth-making’ (Carta 2014: 681).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the Sardinian national question, its historical emergence, the central actors within the independentist movement as well as recent developments in Sardism’s trajectory[47]. It draws from Gramsci’s critique of Italian unification as passive revolution and identifies notable parallels between his analysis of the failures of the Italian national project and the contributing factors often attributed to the emergence of Sardinian nationalism. An appreciation of the movement’s historical roots within this wider context of uneven development and passive revolution is important for the study at hand, providing as it does a necessary introduction to some of the particularities of Sardinian independentism and the role played by what political scientist Carlo Pala describes as a ‘centre-periphery cleavage’ between mainland Italy and the island (Pala 2016: 7). Moreover, it helps us to begin to situate the analysis of sovereignty claims within a relational understanding of the case in question, outlining some of the interconnections drawn between demands for Sardinian national self-determination and the social relations of production that have given shape to Sardinia’s politics and marginalization.

As we shall see in the following chapters, Sardinia’s difficult relationship with the Italian peninsula was often at the heart of sovereignty demands made by activists, many of whom attributed the emergence and significance of Sardinian independentism to the persistence of structural fractures that have characterized Italy's Southern Question more broadly: political and economic disparities between the North and South, widespread clientelism, mass emigration, racial stigmatization and cultural ostracism[48]. Sardinian nationalism has been a reflection not only of failures of the Italian state to adequately represent cultural and national demands for recognition within its borders, but a failure to respond to the economic unevenness of social relations that have long marred regions such as Sardinia.

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[46] Original: ‘Nel viaggiare da Golfo degli Aranci a Cagliari qualche vecchio pastore mostra ancora i monti di nudo granito scintillanti al sole torrido e ricorda che un tempo erano ricoperti di foreste e di pascoli; le piogge torrenziali, dopo lo sboschimento, hanno portato al piano e al mare tutto lo strato di terra utile.’

[47] I use Sardism here in a similar way to Pala as referring to a ‘Sardinian Question’ more generally and not to the ideology of the Partito Sardo d’Azione as it tends to be used more widely (Pala 2016: 75). Pala defined Sardism in the following way: ‘as the totality of motivations (and actions) which at various historical points have contributed to a non-recognition of the state authority of the time, giving way to a territorial fracture with the centre, in a similar way to other European peripheries’ (Pala 2016: 75).

In line with the objective of introducing the Sardinian case, the chapter also provides an overview of the main parties and factions encountered in the field which will be useful in the discussion of activist approaches to sovereignty later on. Moreover, it outlines some of the key conceptual discussions amongst proponents of the Sardinian national cause such as the abandonment of the concept of autonomy in favour of independence, self-determination and sovereignty. It suggests that changes in attitudes towards these concepts in many ways reflect the historic centre-periphery tensions here considered which have contributed to the emergence of Sardinian nationalism.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of Gramsci's analysis of Italy's Southern Question which provides us with a useful framing of the centre-periphery tension used to describe Sardinia's political status. As we shall see, regional historiography similarly points to the role of historic class inequalities and the expansion and consolidation of capitalist interests on the island in the materialization of a Sardinian national question. An examination of Sardism's history and current nationalist debates shows that we cannot separate the emergence of Sardinian nationalism nor activist framings of terms such as sovereignty from a consideration of the mutually constitutive relationship between the cultural question and the island's economic exploitation (Pala 2016: 75). Finally, the chapter provides an overview of more recent debates amongst activists. The material covered in this section will be crucial when we consider discourses of sovereignty in further depth, situating them within an approach that is sensitive to the experiences of activists and how these shape their uses and conceptualizations of sovereignty.

4.2 The Southern Question and Passive Revolution

> "to return to Gramsci, it is 'treated worse than a colony' in terms of its conditions: the lack of investment in infrastructure and territorial development, military occupation, forced industrialization, hostility to the local economy, the

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[48] For notable accounts see Accardo 1996; Boscolo et al. 1996: Brigaglia 2002; Mossa 2008; Onnis 2015; Pala 2016; Sotgiu 1986.

> prohibition and annihilation of its language, the destruction of its historical memories and the more or less induced emigration of its inhabitants, the formation of an exoticized image and frequently racist attitudes towards its inhabitants and their culture" (Own Translation of Mongili 2015: Chap 3, section 2, para.1).

Situated in the middle of the Western Mediterranean, Sardinia's story is a turbulent one (Carta 2014: 677). From its early ancillary position within the Phoenician and Roman Civilizations to its peripheral placement within the Italian state, its current political status is regarded by many islanders as a reflection of the colonial exploits of elites little interested in the fortunes of those who inhabit it. It is an attitude summed up by Sardinian archaeologist Giovanni Lilliu's well-known and somewhat controversial phrase the 'Sardinian resistance constant' which he used to refer to the persistent struggle between islanders and incoming forces (Lilliu 2002). It was a common theme in the many stories activists and acquaintances related to me about their experiences as Sardinians today which often emphasized the highly exploitative relationship the island and its inhabitants have had with their neighbouring 'rulers'. From the upsetting memory of the moment when one person's classmate was severely physically punished by their teacher for their use of Sard in class, to descriptions of the hardships experienced as a result of a lack of work and education, people seemed somewhat united in their shared sense of the historical rootedness of a Sardinian identity indivisible from the daily struggles of poor economic mobility, cultural oppression and territorial isolation. People often took pride in their 'Sardità' (Sardinianness)[49] but many such as Salvatore, an activist in his 70s, nevertheless described feelings of shame that continued to surround their Sardinian identity, particularly notable in the fear and taboo that still haunts the use of Sard in public spaces and politics: 'even today if you speak Sard you are seen as backward' (Salvatore).

Descriptions of the various difficulties of living in Sardinia and being Sardinian echoed the view often expressed in historical literature that has emphasized the strained relationship islanders have historically had with the Italian peninsula. Frequently described in popular literature and historiography as a wild 'hinterland', rugged, austere and remote, filled with indomitable and yet 'noble savages' (Carta 2014: 686; see also Braun 2012 and Urban 2011), Sardinia's place within the Italian state has been fraught with civil unrest much like many other regions within Italy, notably those classed within the South or the Mezzogiorno[50]. This thorny history is in many ways emblematic of the long-standing crisis of the Italian state's national identity described by thinkers such as Gramsci, and while Sardinia's historical trajectory is very different from Southern regions such as Calabria, Campania, and Sicily, there are some notable parallels between the fractures that contributed to Italy's Southern Question and the Sardinian National Question.

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[49] Indeed, a survey conducted by Cagliari University on attitudes towards identity showed that 26% of respondents defined themselves Sardinian and not Italian, 37% more Sardinian than Italian and 31% Sardinian and Italian. Only 5% defined themselves as more Italian than Sardinian and 1% Italian and not Sardinian (Demuro et al. 2013: 27-28).

[50] There is not a clear definition of the Mezzogiorno but common classifications tend to include: Campania, Calabria, Basilicata, Puglia, Abruzzo, Molise, Sicily and Sardinia. Originally used in the 1860s to describe the

Italy's Southern Question emerged as an academic issue in the late 1800s, gaining political prominence into the early 20th century following the aggravation of the economic and infrastructural splits between Italy's North and South during the industrial boom around the Northern cities of Turin, Milan and Genova (Bevilacqua 1996: 82-83; Capussotti 2010: 123). The issue was a central concern in the post-war rebuilding of the country's economy (Bevilacqua: 1996) and continues to be relevant today in discussions around education (Baldissera & Cornali 2020), economy (Polverari 2013), employment (Alacevich 2013; Felice 2010; Lüttge 2014), and culture (Braun 2012). Initially used to describe the wave of brigandage that took hold in Southern Italy post-unification in 1861, the Southern Question has since referred to a range of issues revolving around Italy's deep regional cleavages, in particular, disparities in economic development and cultural and racial prejudice (Pescosolido 2019). Indeed, the South-North divide has been hard to shake off, becoming a permanent feature of 'Italy's entire economic and social history of 150 years' (Pescosolido 2019: 443), manifest in continued 'anti-southernism in the North' as seen with the emergence of the far-right Northern League and the continuation of the widening of regional wealth gaps (Pescosolido 2019).

As we saw previously, amongst the most notable figures behind attempts to make sense of the Southern Question was none other than Gramsci whose well-known essay 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question' (1994) denounced the historic subjugation of the Mezzogiorno by the Italian political class and called for the need to foster links between the proletariat and large peasant populations in the South and islands in order to begin to rectify the class inequalities that had until then characterized life in Italy. The essay considered the strategic benefits of the move, which would help in the development of a unitary workers' movement that could create a genuinely transformative, inclusive and organic process of change.

Similarly, his *Prison Notebooks* critiqued the Risorgimento and the Italian state on the basis of their failure to create a genuinely unifying project that actively included the majority of the population. The Southern Question was emblematic of the passive nature of the Italian

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surge in 'brigand' activity in the South following the annexation of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies within the newly unified Kingdom of Italy (Pescosolido 2019: 442), the 'Southern Question' has since been used to refer to conditions of inequality and 'under-development' in the South (Riall 2000: 90).

national moment as the result of a process of capitalist expansion that was consolidated through the partial 'restoration' or 'conservation' of elite interests in the shape of class alliances between an emerging bourgeoisie and an already existing landowning aristocracy (Gramsci 1992: 150). The characterization of the Risorgimento as a passive revolution referred to the ways in which it was the product of changes made from 'above', a 'revolution without mass participation' (Morton 2010: 317): 'a restoration in which there was 'the acceptance, in mitigated and camouflaged forms, of the same principles that had been combatted' (Gramsci 1996: 389).

Whilst he did not explicitly frame his argument under the lens of uneven and combined development[51], Gramsci's analysis captured the uneven dynamics underpinning capitalist development across Italy which was pursued through highly exploitative strategies of policing and primitive accumulation across a territory which was already intensely varied given the diverse productive relations, languages, cultures and social imaginaries that had preceded the Kingdom of Italy (Morton 2007a: 64). For Gramsci the Southern Question was symptomatic of this uneven reception and dissemination of capitalist reforms that did not account for such cultural and material variations. Whilst the North soon saw large scale transformation, the South failed to experience similar growth due to the lack of substantive agrarian reform in the highly unequal agricultural economies of what was once the Bourbon regime in the South (Gramsci 1992: 328; Morton 2007b). Crucially, Italy's 'failure' and in particular of its progressive forces lay in their intrinsic inability to offer a resolution to deep class and regional disparities that existed in the 'peninsula' (Gramsci 1934-1935). Those driving the Italian national project underplayed the significance of Southern peasants' interests and potential contribution to the organization and materialization of widespread change thereby weakening the Risorgimento's claims to represent a national-popular will (Gramsci 1934-1935). In Gramsci's words:

> "It is obvious that in order to counterpose itself effectively to the Moderates, the Action Party ought to have allied itself with the rural masses, especially those in the South, and ought to have been 'Jacobin' not only in external 'form', in temperament, but most particularly in socio-economic content' (Gramsci 1971: 74).

Gramsci showed that the failure to adequately solve these inequalities, however, was not merely an oversight on the part of the people's advocates but became an integral feature of the Italian state project which saw an increasing interdependency between both the North and South, the former of which had functioned as a '"parasite" [...] enriching itself at the expense of the South, [...] industrial development was dependent in the impoverishment of Southern agriculture' (Gramsci 1992: 143).

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[51] Uneven and combined development has been attributed to the work of Leon Trotsky to refer to 'a historic process that compels, "under the whip of eternal necessity", states in the capitalist periphery to engage in developmental catch-up with their more advanced counterparts (Trotsky 1936/1980: 28)' (Morton 2011: 12). The phrase captures the highly differentiated nature of the development of capitalism and the extent to which 'the more "advanced" modes of production induce "material and intellectual conquests" that are combined and assimilated albeit without repeating the same forms of development because "a backward country does not take things in the same order" (Trotsky 1980 [1932]:26–27)' (Hesketh & Morton 2014: 152).

Significantly, the Risorgimento was not only a means through which the bourgeoisie in areas such as Piedmont consolidated their desire for capitalist development, but was symptomatic of a 'differential historical atmosphere' in Europe (Gramsci 1992: 150). The production or development of a national project in many respects represented a desire to 'respond' to changes occurring in neighbouring states, which in the aftermath of the French Revolution and subsequent establishment of the liberal state were seeing the surge of the bourgeoisie as key driving force (Gramsci 1992: 151). The top-down approach of the Risorgimento was the result not only of the elite forces driving it but of the 'imposed' nature of economic transformation in social contexts which were very different and not equally primed for the organic development of such changes (Gramsci 1971: 116-117; Gramsci 1932-1935). The Action Party had confused cultural unity with political and territorial 'unity' (Gramsci 1934-1935). The cultural unity that the Action Party purported to represent was detached from the daily experiences of community and 'custom' that Italy's diverse population engaged in. It was not enough to claim to speak for the peasant majority under the guise of national unification and republican ideas of freedom and equality. What was necessary was to also present an economic and political programme that addressed the exploitation of these communities.

An important contribution of Gramsci's analysis lay in the ways in which he was able to emphasize the 'successes' of the Risorgimento which had managed to construct highly selective narratives of Italian national identity through civil society, schools, the press, literature and so forth and the absorption and co-optation of competing class claims. He showed how, the differences between the South and North, for example, were not addressed as threats to unification but were largely attributed to inherent flaws of the Southern people, reflecting pseudo sciences of institutional racism that had accompanied colonial expansion in other areas of the world. Gramsci writes:

> ''[t]he "poverty" of the South was "historically" inexplicable to the Northern popular masses: they did not understand that unity had not been created on a basis of equality, but as hegemony of the North over the South in a city-country territorial relation' (Gramsci 1992: 143).

In another passage Gramsci reflected:

> ‘The ordinary man from Northern Italy thought rather that, if the Mezzogiorno made no progress after having been liberated from the fetters which the Bourbon regime placed in the way of a modern development, this meant that the causes of the poverty were not external, to be sought in objective economic and political conditions, but internal, innate in the population of the South – and this all the more since there was a deeply-rooted belief in the great natural wealth of the terrain. There remained only one explanation – the organic incapacity of the inhabitants, their barbarity, their biological inferiority. These already widespread opinions […] were consolidated and actually theorised by the sociologists of positivism […] acquiring the strength of “scientific truth” in a period of superstition about science’ (Gramsci 1971: 71).

Gramsci also appreciated how the class and ethnic divisions central to the newly founded Italian state signalled spaces for Italy’s potential undoing, indicating weaknesses in the North’s hegemony and the ‘obsession’ of political figures such as Crispi with Italian unification at all costs. Gramsci states:

> ‘The hegemony of the North would have been “normal” and historically beneficial if industrialism had been able gradually to enlarge its horizons so as to continue incorporating new assimilated economic zones. Then, this hegemony would have been the expression of a struggle between the old and the new, between progress and backwardness, between the most productive and the less productive; there would have been an economic revolution of a national character (and on a national scale) even though its driving force would have been temporarily and functionally regional. All the economic forces would have been stimulated and the conflict would have yielded greater unity. The hegemony seemed permanent; the conflict seemed to be a necessary historical condition for an indeterminate period of time and, therefore, apparently “perpetual” due to the existence of a northern industry’ (Gramsci 1992: 228).

Gramsci here notes the North’s ‘abnormal’ hegemony that stemmed from a ‘transformist’[52] (Gramsci 1971: 59) political leadership that underplayed such uneven relations and treated the national ‘project’ as a ‘rational absolute’ at the expense of the inclusion of Italy’s poorest (Gramsci 1992: 230). Central to the hegemony of Italy’s emerging political class was the treatment of their visions of the national project as a permanent horizon. As Bates summarises:

> ‘They wanted to “dominate”, not to “lead”, and furthermore they wanted their interests to dominate, not their persons. That is, they wanted a new force to become arbiter of the nation: this force was Piedmont and the Monarchy. The result was a “passive revolution”’ (Bates 1975: 354).

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[52] Transformism or ‘trasformismo’ in Italian has been a highly debated term in Italian political analysis, frequently equated to a form of centrism that has at various points in Italian history dominated politics (Donovan & Newell 2008; Bianchi 2015) and in the case of Gramsci, it referred to the ‘gradual but continuous absorption’ of progressive forces by the right (Gramsci 1971: 58-59).

4.3 Sardinia and the Legacies of Passive Revolution

Gramsci's critique and analysis of Passive Revolution and the Southern Question has been a highly influential reading of Italian history and provides a useful framework for understanding the kinds of roots activists and historians have attributed to the development of the Sardinian national struggle. Indeed, Sardinia was central to Gramsci's discussions of the regional issue, frequently used as an example of the limits of unification. His early publications in newspapers such as *Avanti!* frequently considered issues of inequality in Sardinia, tracing some of the main challenges facing the region at the time as far back as the early 1800s to the agrarian issue, the disastrous effects of deforestation on the island (in Melis 1975: 88), extreme poverty, famine (in Melis 1975: 88) and class struggle as a result of capitalist expansion (in Melis 1975: 89-90). Gramsci also made reference to the emergence of early Sardinian nationalism, namely, Sardism, in 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', where he noted the potential role post-WWI mobilization in these 'peripheral' areas and amongst groups such as the Giovane Sardegna, an association that sought to create a rural bloc across the islands and Italian peninsula, could have in the development of a workers' alliance (Gramsci 1994). The Giovane Sardegna had ties with the Sassari Brigade, a leading force behind the eventual establishment of the first Sardist party and the oldest existing regional party in Italy, the Partito Sardo d'Azione (PSd'Az).

Speaking of the fraught relationship between island landowners and the peasant communities, he noted:

> 'The Sardinian lords who in the villages and in the cities of the island, consider the strong and intelligent peasant as a beast for whom shoes or beatings are not measured but frugal food is, the sad lords who have divided the island of Sardinia in so many small estates outside of the law and who torment and exploit the peasants through depraved and heinous means helped by prefects, subprefects, magistrates, carabinieri marshals […] The Sardinian peasant must remain the grinding (ass), on whose back the lord goes for a walk. The Sardinian peasant isn't even a man for these descendants of the Aragonese, Pisan, and continental Italians (the Sardinian bourgeoisie is not of Sardinian origin, but imported in various epochs of history)[53] (own translation Gramsci 1919 in Melis 1975: 98-99).

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[53] Original: 'I signorotti sardi che, nei paesi e nelle città dell'isola, tengono il forte e intelligente contadino in conto di una bestia alla quale non si misurano i calci e le randellate mentre si misura il cibo frugale; i tristi signori che hanno diviso l'isola di Sardegna in tanti piccoli feudi fuori della legge e tormentano e sfruttano i contadini con ogni arte turpe e infame, aiutati da prefetti, da sottoprefetti, da pretori, da marescialli dei carabinieri [...] Il contadino sardo deve rimanere il <<molente>> (asino), sulla groppa del quale il signore va a spasso. Il contadino sardo non è neppure uomo, per questi discendenti dei conquistatori aragonesi e pisani e continentali italiani (la borghesia non è d'origine sarda, ma importata nelle varie epoche della storia).'

In a similar article entitled ‘The Pains of Sardinia’ published in *Avanti!* in 1919 he lamented the censure of any mention of Turin’s exploitation of Sardinia:

> ‘Why must it be prohibited for *Avanti!* to remember that the board of directors of the Sardinian Railway and a few mining companies have their headquarters in Turin? Why must it be prohibited to remember that shareholders of the Sardinian Railway, who share lavish dividends, who cash in from the state lavish allowances for every kilometre of railway, force the Sardinian shepherds and peasants to travel in livestock carriages, force the Sardinian shepherds and peasants to pay extremely high tariffs […]?
>
> Why can’t it be remembered that Sardinian miners are paid with salaries of hunger, whilst the Turin shareholders fatten their wallets with dividends crystallised with the blood of Sardinian miners who are often forced to eat roots in order to not die of hunger? Why must it be prohibited to remember that two thirds of Sardinia’s inhabitants (especially the women and children) walk barefoot in the winter and summer […] because the price of leather has been raised to the prohibiting duty levels that enrichen the Turin leather industrialist, one of whom is president of the Turin Chamber of Commerce? Why must it be prohibited to remember what was said in the last Sardinian congress in Rome by a Sardinian general: that is, that the fifty years between 1860-1910, the Italian state, in which the Piedmontese nobility and bourgeoisie have always dominated, he had estimated that the Sardinian peasants and shepherds had gifted 500 million lire to the Italian political class? Why must it be prohibited to remember that in the Italian State, the Sardinia of the peasants, of the shepherds, of the artisans is treated worse than the Eritrean colony in terms of how much the State spends; whilst it exploits Sardinia by collecting an imperial tribute?’[54] (Own translation Gramsci 1919 in Melis 1975: 94-95).

Both of Gramsci’s critiques were stark reminders of how entrenched class divisions and attitudes were on the island, capturing a recurring tension between the experiences of the vast majority of Sardinians and a political class more interested in the maintenance of unequal social relations. The silencing of such critiques which he here criticized, stressed the exclusion of any attempt to contest official narratives promoted by Turin based investors, while the literal starvation of peasants at the hands of landowners emphasized the degree of disdain felt towards the peasantry. The disparities in investment that Gramsci described in his comparison of Sardinia to Eritrea also spoke of the unevenness of capitalist development in Sardinia echoing his broader critique of the Southern Question.

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[54] Original: ‘Perché deve essere proibito all <<Avanti!>> ricordare che a Torino hanno la sede i consigli d’amministrazione delle Ferrovie sarde e di qualche società mineraria sarda? Perché deve essere proibito ricordare che gli azionisti delle Ferrovie Sarde, i quali si dividono lautissimi dividendi, i quali riscuotono dallo Stato lautissime indennità per ogni chilometro di strada ferrata, fanno viaggiare i pastori e i contadini sardi in vetture di bestiame, fanno pagare ai pastori e ai contadini sardi tariffe altissime? [...] Perché non si può ricordare che i minatori sardi sono pagati con salari di fame, mentre gli azionisti torinesi impinguano i loro portafogli coi dividendi cristalizzati col sangue dei minatori sardi, che spesso si riducono a mangiare le radici per non morire di fame? Perché deve essere proibito ricordare che due terzi degli abitanti della Sardegna (specialmente le donne e i bambini) vanno scalzi d’inverno e d’estate [...] perché il prezzo delle pelli è portato ad altezze proibitive dai dazi protettori che arricchiscono gli industriali torinesi di cuoio, uno dei quali è presidente della Camera di Commercio di Torino? Perché è proibito ricordare ciò che ha detto, nell’ultimo congresso sardo tenuto a Roma, un generale sardo: che cioè, nel cinquantennio 1860-1910, lo Stato italiano, nel quale hanno sempre predominato la borghesia e la nobiltà piemontese, ha prelevato dai contadini e pastori sardi 500 milioni di lire che ha regalato alla classe dirigente italiana non sarda? Perché deve essere proibito ricordare che nello Stato italiano, la Sardegna dei contadini, dei pastori e degli artigiani è trattata peggio della colonia eritrea, in quanto lo Stato <<spende>> per l’Eritrea mentre sfrutta la Sardegna, prelevandovi un tributo imperiale?’

Importantly, Gramsci is not alone in his critique of Sardinia's historical conditions. His concerns are mirrored in Sardinian historiography, much of which has similarly emphasized long-standing issues of economic inequality and political oppression that accompanied Piedmontese rule and unification. Historians have variously shown that as one of Italy's founding regions of what would later become the Kingdom of Italy[55], Sardinia played a highly utilitarian role in the expansion of Piedmontese interests as a source of cheap labour, land and raw materials, missing out from the rapid industrialization and accumulation of wealth that took place in Italy's Northern regions. The island's inclusion within the Italian state came at the expense of political autonomy, economic custom, and an appreciation of Sardinia's cultural and historical peculiarities in discussions of Italian national identity and history (Caterini 2013 & 2017). Indeed, its exclusion continues to be visible today in Sardinia's scant appearance in Italian studies journals such as *Modern Italy* and *Journal of Modern Italian Studies,* in well-known and important attempts to unpack Italy's regional divides and hierarchies such as Jane Schneider's work (1998), in the countless images of the Italian map which quite often exclude Sardinia[56] altogether, and in pervasive stereotypes of Sardinians as cold, wary, and wild.

Crucially for us, this difficult history of economic inequality and political oppression has been a major contributing factor behind the emergence of a Sardinian 'national' question (Pala 2016). More specifically, Sardinia and Sardinian nationalism can be regarded as an early sign of a 'crisis of authority'[57] within the nascent Italian state, the result of a far from straightforward process of unification and an early indicator of the 'blocked dialectic' that characterized the Italian national project which stemmed from the persistence of class antagonisms and the popular deficit of the newly emerging Italian state which had failed to successfully establish its political and cultural primacy in the area. Indeed, we can trace the beginnings of Sardinia's difficult relationship with the Italian national project as far back as Sardinia's cession to the Duchy of Savoy (which would later become the Kingdom of Sardinia and Piedmont) in 1718 (Pala 2016: 76). The Duchy which was then Turin based, primarily utilized Sardinia for the extraction of goods such as wood and was reluctant to provide aid to a famished population, implementing political reforms that stripped the local elites of powers previously enjoyed under Spanish rule (Ortu 2011: Part 2, Chap. 2, section 1., para. 2) and consolidating an almost 'colonial' relationship not dissimilar from the semi-colonial relationship Gramsci would posit between Northern elites and the Southern peasant populations a couple of centuries later.

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[55] Particularly striking examples in this respect, can be found in the work of Fiorenzo Caterini (2013), who has pointed to the environmentally catastrophic decimation of the island's forests to build amongst other things, the Italian railway. His other study on Italian historiography considers the minimal attention paid by Italian historiography to the island's rich ancient past, which is seen in the near absence of Sardinia's ancient history in national curricula (2017). According to Caterini, the omission of Sardinian history in state reproduced accounts is an example of the failures of Italian nationalism and unification to adequately incorporate such regional differences into its claims for identity and national unity, and more nefariously, a symptom of a political and intellectual establishment founded on the silencing of regional histories that contradict myths of an ancient Italian culture.

[56] For example, Alitalia's inflight brochure map: https://www.sardiniapost.it/economia/lo-stivale-senza-la-sardegna-la-geografia-secondo-la-rivista-alitalia/?fbclid=IwAR3GuMMuGUo-Q3xgHE2FepdBgnZ7vWAm44cM2uQz1It3rGefqmFDMVlM_9A

[57] Gramsci used the notion of crisis of authority to describe when there is a 'crisis of the ruling class's hegemony, which occurs either because the ruling class has requested, or forcible extracted, the consent of the broad masses (war, for example), or because huge masses (especially of peasants and petit-bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution' (Gramsci 1971: 210).

It is worth noting that the issue of uneven development was not new to Sardinia at this point. Prior to the cession, the island had struggled under an austere feudal system introduced by the Spanish and Aragonese crowns following the fall of the Sardinian judicates, four 'semi-feudal' kingdoms in the 15th century (Casula 2002; Sorge 2015: Chap. 2, section 4, para. 10). The imposition of Spanish rule had brought an end to an extended period of political 'independence' and the introduction of feudalism, the impact of which Gramsci showed would continue to be felt well into the 1900s (see Melis 1975: 98). Despite being recognized by the Iberic peninsula as a 'nation'[58], the lack of interest shown to Sardinia by the Spanish crown due in part to Spain's preoccupation with colonial expansion in the Americas (Sorge 2015: Chap. 2, section 4, para. 11) had resulted in dire infrastructure, conflicts between the island's nobility and poverty (Ortu 2011: Part 2, Chapter 1, section 2, para. 16) which would see little improvement when Sardinia was eventually 'ceded' to a reluctant Duchy of Savoy (Casula 2002: 38-39; Carta Raspi 1971-1987: 773).

The key thing to stress about this transition is that Savoyard rule would see a continuation of these long-standing inequalities as opposed to an amelioration, with Sardinia quickly becoming the site of early transformist measures in the form of economic and political reforms that would come to characterize the Risorgimento and the passage to capitalism in the years to come. Sardinians were denied much say in huge transformations made to the island's economy aimed at abolishing the feudal system, 'uniforming' Sardinia's economy with

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[58] During this period we see the establishment of the Regnum Sardiniae in the mid-1500s which provided Sardinian elites with political powers through the 'Stamenti', one of the first European parliamentary systems (Pala 2016: 76).

Piedmont and expanding private land ownership (Contu 1990: 88). Such reforms were done through violent measures that saw rural communities stripped of access to land used communally through the long-standing 'ademprivi' system which had functioned as a source of subsistence, allowing peasants and shepherds to use lands for grazing and cultivation (Onnis 2015: 164). Their initial abolition had catastrophic consequences, concentrating power within the hands of landowning classes and contributing to a situation where the majority of the population did not have the resources to purchase land (Onnis 2015: 164), a fifth was starving, and hundreds would beg along the main road that traversed the island (Brigaglia 1996a: 151). Those who bought land included members of Piedmont's expanding bourgeoisie as well as feudal lords who were reimbursed through generous pay offs by the Piedmontese in a bid to minimize opposition to feudalism's abolition. Piedmont prime minister Cavour's final abolition of the 'ademprivi' in order to make way for a regional railway, led to a further 200,000 hectares being taken away from public access, whilst 278,000 were given to villages and towns to sell off (Contu 1990: 101). The project, however, was never completed and instead gave way to the destruction of the island's once vast forests, some of which had already been used in the creation of extensive railway tracks in the Italian peninsula, bringing about not only issues of drought, flooding and landslides that continue to be a problem today but the destruction of the local population's relationship with the forest as a source of subsistence, ritual and tradition (Caterini 2013).

Contu notes that conditions were so bad during this extended upheaval that even Mazzini, a central figure within the Action Party and the Risorgimento had condemned the catastrophic agrarian reforms in Sardinia which had failed to account for differences in its economic and social structures (1990: 92). Mazzini stated: 'the abolition of the latifundia "was not tempered with provisions that would alleviate poverty, was disconnected from economic improvements, and aggravated the position of those for whom good had been sanctioned"' (Own translation of Contu 1990: 92). Meanwhile the 'Perfect Fusion' of 1848, an act which would introduce a series of reforms to the island's political and institutional organisation in a bid to bring Sardinia into greater alignment with the Kingdom's two other regions, Savoy and Piedmont, removed any autonomy the island had enjoyed and increasingly concentrated power within the hands of the Turin monarchy (Onnis 2015: 172) [59].

In ways similar to the Risorgimento, 'progressive' forces in Sardinia were partly behind these changes. The push for greater centralization, for instance, had been primarily backed by the small Sardinian bourgeoisie who welcomed the reforms as a means of ‘liberalizing’ the island’s economy (Contu 1990: 93) and seeking greater inclusion in a growing customs union in the Italian peninsula (Brigaglia 1996a: 151; Contu 1990: 93). Rather than bringing about the changes they desired, however, the reforms led to continued extraction of resources and an overreliance on the production of Pecorino which led to the development of a highly fragile ‘mono-cultural’ economy (Onnis 2015: 181).

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[59] The reforms included greater freedom for the press, limits on the Church's power, and the abolition of Sardinia's Supreme Court, and Stamenti (Brigaglia 1996: 147)

During this time, the island struggled with chronic underfunding. It was largely excluded from early Italian programmes of investment seen in the South, with the exception of some investment in mining industries and the establishment of a railway system (Pala 2016: 80). Issues of illiteracy were rife for much of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and local infrastructure was virtually non-existent. Del Piano notes that figures recorded at the end of the 1800s show that out of 85,502 children between 6 and 12, only 18,160 went to school, only 128 students attended university (Del Piano 1996: 210-211). In a particularly stark example, between 1894 and 1910 only 95 metres of national roads were built (Del Piano 1995: 235). Echoing the highly racialised anti-southern discourses condemned by Gramsci, during the late 1800s we also see the emergence of highly racialized discourses of the biological ‘inferiority’ of the Southern populations, with Sardinians often depicted as inherently predisposed towards criminality and racially distinct from Aryans due to their ‘different skull sizes’ (Onnis 2015: 183). According to Onnis, it was an approach that served to justify the brutal military persecution in the late 1800s of Sardinian ‘delinquency’, known as the ‘the Big Hunt’, ‘Caccia Grossa’ (Onnis 2015: 182). Indeed, in a now infamous publication entitled *La Delinquenza in Sardegna* written by Alfredo Niceforo in 1897, Sardinian criminality was attributed to the ‘inferiority’ of ‘race’ and the primitive nature of local norms (Del Piano 1996: 272).

The parallels between Sardinia’s early relationship with Piedmont and the highly uneven process of development that shaped Italy’s Mezzogiorno are thus numerous. Like the Southern peninsula, Sardinia’s dependency on Turin was from the very beginning made possible through the removal of political ‘autonomy’, large pay offs to the aristocracy, control of market access through protectionist policies that largely suited industrialists and company owners based in Turin, extreme policing and judicial systems tilted towards landowners’ needs, and the introduction of economic reforms that did not reflect the needs and conditions of the island’s impoverished population. Crucially, much like the Italian Risorgimento, the relative success of Italian unification in Sardinia lay in Piedmont’s managing to create an alliance with the island’s political class at the expense of the peasant and emerging proletariat communities. Rather than signalling any liberating transformation of social relations, it went hand in hand with *restorative* strategies that in many ways conserved class relations which had dominated prior to unification.

Importantly for us, the exploitative nature of Sardinia's inclusion within the Kingdom of Italy, seems to have played a pivotal role in shaping the Sardinian National Question. From its inception the Sardinian nationalist movement was inseparable from the backlash against repressive economic policies introduced and maintained by Piedmont, later the Italian government and the island's small elites. Attempts to theorize or think about Sardinia's conditions often followed periods of social unrest and high inequality. Such waves of activity give credence to Pala's claim (2016) that a Sardinian centre-periphery cleavage was mainly driven by economic inequalities. A desire for greater autonomy in many ways reflected the political vacuum left by the punitive programmes pursued by island and peninsula elites which stripped the majority of Sardinians from historical sources of subsistence and violently oppressed contestation (Sotgiu 1977: 21).

Indeed, much like regions once pertaining to the Kingdoms of Sicily in the 1800s in the South of Italy, there was an increase in banditry in response to high levels of inequality and land disputes at the time of Sardinia's cession to the Duchy of Savoy (Carta Raspi 1971- 1987) which would eventually lead to bitter and violent attempts to persecute rebelling forces as well as the prohibition of the use of Sard in public office (Pala 2016: 77). Such repressive measures fuelled civil unrest from as far back as the late 18th century, leading to the emergence of what is often described as the 'Revolutionary Years' of 1793-6 that followed the successful defeat of a French fleet in 1794 and an alliance drawn between local elites focused on the reinstatement of Sardinia's powers as the Regnum Sardiniae from the Turin based crown (Accardo 1996: 12). The Piedmontese's refusal to grant the requests led to much agitation and the temporary removal of the viceroy and 500 Piedmontese from the island (Contu 1990: 77). Anti-feudal peasant revolts also gained momentum signalling the growing influence of the French revolution on the island (Accardo 1996) but also of the growing tensions between the landowning aristocracy and the peasantry (Contu 1990: 78). Land reforms imposed by the Piedmontese and island elites were not uniformly accepted but rather contributed to widespread and regular attempts to revolt as seen in massive protests such as the well-known 'Su Connotu' uprising in Nuoro in 1868 (Contu 1990: 101).

Significantly, the 'Revolutionary years' marked the beginning of the development of a specifically 'national' argument for independence through publications such as *Il Giornale di Sardegna* (Contu 1990: 81) where a small republican intellectual faction began to reflect on the Sardinian struggle (Accardo 1996: 14-16; Cardia 1999: 114; Onnis 2015: 150). At the helm of this revolutionary spirit were well-known and now revered figures such as Giovanni Maria Angioy who, following an unsuccessful attempt to establish a unifying republican movement across the island, escaped to Paris in exile (Accardo 1996: 13). The Angioy led insurrection was met with violent repression at the hands of figures such as the ferocious Giuseppe Valentino (Carta Raspi 1971-1985: 830) and alliances between the feudal lords and the conservative small bourgeoisie opposed to the popular uprisings (Contu 1990: 76-81).

Whilst the Angioy insurrection did not succeed, it nevertheless represented the height of elite support for Sardinian independence (Pala 2016: 77) and served to plant early seeds for attempts to theorize and make sense of a Sardinian Question as the push for Italian unification was well under way in the peninsula. In what has been described as the 'risveglio culturale', or cultural awakening (Accardo 1996: 14-15), commentators such as Giuseppe Manno Pasquale Tola, Pietro Martini, La Mormora, Giovanni Siotto Pintor, Francesco Sulis, Giovanni Battista Tuveri, and Antioco Polla began to study Sardinia's socio-economic and political conditions as a 'national' entity within Italy (Accardo 1996: 15-16) with some such as Tuveri calling for a 'federalist' approach (Pala 2016: 78). Significantly, there was a definitive coalescing of demands for improved working and economic conditions and the question of Sardinian national autonomy (Pala 2016: 78) as seen at the 1881 'moti della fame' or 'the hunger uprisings' in Sanluri, where we witness a notable shift in the focus of workers' protests in favour of greater Sardinian autonomy.

The national question continued to gain traction at the turn of the century. The early 1900s cemented the merging of Sardism and the workers' protest movement (Pala 2016) through revolts such as Italy's first workers' strike in the small mining village of Buggeru which culminated in the death of several protesters (Pala 2016: 80). Nothing, however, would have such a unifying effect on the Sardist cause than the First World War which gave Sardinian troops who had never left the island[60], first hand insights into the stark social and cultural differences between Sardinia and the Northern peninsula (Pala 2016: 81). The Sassari Brigade produced a number of notable officers such as Emilio Lussu and Camillo Bellieni, both of whom emerged as leading figures behind the Sardist movement and presided over the formation of the PSd'Az in 1921. The key demands made by this early movement included: 'the promotion of the rebirth of Sardinia', 'the attainment of economic and administrative autonomy within the unity of the Italian state', and 'the improvement of the moral and material conditions through the development of a cooperative movement, the organization of production and unionist forms' (own translation Cubeddu: 76-77, unionist here is translated from 'sindicali' and refers to the workers unions). The party 'born as a mass movement, for the defence of the worker' (Own translation Cubbedu: 100-101) gained 36% of the vote in Sardinia in its first election. The party was unique in that it was not clearly demarcated on a class basis and included members of the petit bourgeoisie, lawyers, teachers, factory workers, farmers, shepherds, a feature that in many ways continues to characterize the Sardist movement today (Pala 2016: 83).

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[60] A total of 100,000 men took part in the war out of a total of 859,000 inhabitants (Brigaglia 1996b: 316)

Interestingly, the movement's early focus on improving material conditions were echoed in some of my interviews with veteran activists. Emilio a 90-year-old interviewee and long-time activist of the PSd'Az described Sardism's early years and the start of his activism when his was a young man in the 1940s:

> 'We needed to start doing something for the people who wanted to work, needed to work, so we decided to organize a cooperative of farmers without land in order to utilize the unharvested land […] because they had explained to us that following the First World War, a great intellectual from Sassari, Camillo Bellieni, […] had begun to organize the peasants and organize the PSd'Az, mutilated, handicapped after the war. [He] went from town to town by foot – by *foot!* […] Why? In order to meet the peasants! And speak precisely of the need to unite, to cooperate, to work together. And we did the same things. I grabbed my bicycle and not just me, leaders of the party in that period […]
>
> I would say that the Partito Sardo d'Azione at its origins but for many, many decades, was inspired by socialism. Lussu for example was inspired by socialism and for this reason contact with the masses of workers needed to be one of the cardinal points […] This is needed and needs to be even today, one of the most important moments i.e. go to the people, convince them to create groups, cooperatives, societies in order to create work, to *produce.'*

According to Emilio, the PSd'Az emerged as a response to a perceived need to cooperate and work together in order to improve working conditions. Socialism and a desire to build a mass worker's movement was thus at the heart of the objectives of some of the party's central advocates. Moreover, what his account further highlights is that the legacies of the early Sardist tradition focused on issues of economic inequality and underdevelopment, had continued to filter into the movement during the 20th century, defining not only the kinds of demands made by activists but also its internal divisions. As I would come to learn, the latter primarily revolved around the ideological positioning of party members in Left-Right terms and the support of a 'federalist' versus a secessionist approach (Pala 2016: 82). Such divides were further aggravated with the advent of fascism which produced marked splits between those who were attracted by fascist promises of greater support for Sardinia through the 'Legge del Miliardo' investment programme (Brigaglia 1996b: 317) and those with ties to socialist ideals (Pala 2016: 82). The PSd'Az which was at the heart of the movement became increasingly torn between activists favouring a socialist federation, others who favoured a federalist approach tied to the Fascist state, and some who identified with neither (Pala 2016: 80).

These divides were not simply the reflection of differing views on the kind of relationship activists wanted with Italy. They were deeply embedded in the ongoing legacies of the passive nature of unification, representing an ongoing reflection of the transformist capacities of the Italian State strongly condemned by Gramsci. Indeed, the Fascist regime rather than delivering on its promises of further investment would see the pursuit of culturally repressive policies that promoted a more homogenous narrative of Italian national identity throughout the Italian state (Pala 2016: 83) as well as increased centralization of power throughout Italy (Brigaglia 1996b: 319). The failure to offer a coherent class critique by the Sardist movement became a recurring tension throughout the 20th century, expressed in the turn away from a 'federalist' position that called for Sardinian 'autonomy' within the Italian state to an 'independentist' one that sought outright secession (Sotgiu 1977).

4.4 Autonomism, Independentism, and Sovereignty

Gramsci died in 1937 before the second international conflict of WWII exploded in Europe. He did not witness the eventual fall of the Fascist Kingdom of Italy and instatement of the Italian Republic that saw some attempts to move away from the highly centralized political system established by the Fascist regime via, amongst other things, recognition of Sardinia, Sicily, Val d'Aosta, Friuli, Venezia Giulia, Trentino Alto Adige as 'Special Autonomous Regions'. Each region had a Special Statute approved which specified the scope of their devolved governments. In Sardinia it was drafted by a committee composed of members of the newly founded Christian Democracy party (DC), the PSd'Az, and Communist, Socialist, and Liberal parties, and was eventually approved in 1948, signalling the beginning of a period of 'formalized' i.e. state recognized autonomy (Brigaglia 1996b: 333-334). Sardinia's devolved government was split into a regional president, regional council and regional parliament, and the Statute provided Sardinia with jurisdiction over the organisation of regional and local bodies, policing, tourism and agriculture, as well as legislative powers over industry, saving banks, cooperatives, public transport, health, and tax collection[61] (Gherardini 1996).

Importantly, the establishment of the Special Autonomous Region of Sardinia marked an important shift in Sardinian politics, not only providing institutional infrastructure for greater autonomy and concerted state efforts to address Sardinia's long-standing 'underdevelopment', but also contributing to a series of changes in activist demands away from autonomism and federalism towards independentism. In the 1950s the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno (Fund for the South) was set up with the help of World Bank financing, aimed at 'closing the gap between the North and South (Pescosolido 2019: 445)[62]. The Cassa's focus was on industrializing Southern areas through policies approved by the World Bank, which by the end of the 1950s had promised a loan of around 300 million dollars to the South (Alacevich 2013: 103; Bottazzi 2013: 14). In Sardinia these investment initiatives manifested in the anti-malaria campaign funded by the Rockefeller foundation and the Piani di Rinascita (Rebirth Plans), which were set up with the aim of addressing Sardinia's infrastructural deficiencies. Indeed, familiar issues related to poor infrastructure, organized crime and illness continued to affect living conditions on the island (Pala 2016: 104). 600 billion lire were invested in large plants (Pala 2016: 104) such as Nino Rovelli's extensive petrochemical plant in Porto Torres (Pazzona 2012: 49).

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[61] The current statute can be accessed at: http://www.regione.sardegna.it/documenti/1_5_20150114110812.pdf

The Rebirth Plans had limited success, however, serving in many ways instead to increase political and economic dependency on Italy (Hepburn 2009b). Key contributing factors included the over reliance on large petrochemical plants which were highly susceptible to fluctuations in market prices (Fadda 1999), the highly corrupt nature of the approval and distribution of funding by regional bodies (Hepburn 2009b), the isolated position of Sardinia within Europe, (Fadda 1999) and the existence of a substantial agricultural labour force (Pala 2016: 105). Moreover, the policies saw little hope of success due to a reliance on social forces not endogenous to the region but on investors based outside (Sabattini 2006).

The combined approval of the Rebirth Plans and Sardinia's formal recognition as an autonomous region and the former's limited success, contributed to a rejection of autonomism in favour of independentism. At the heart of increasing antipathy towards autonomy and a federal solution, were familiar discussions tied to the legacies of the Southern Question such as the issue of state collaboration, class antagonisms and the direction of Sardist mobilization. The policies adopted post-WWII are widely regarded as continuations of the longer history of clientelism and state collaboration considered previously (Fazi 2012; Hepburn 2009b). During the 1960s in particular, the term 'autonomy' was increasingly tied to the politics of regional government, and critics began to associate autonomy with the PSd'Az and its failure to function as an opposition to centralized government. Activists argued that 'the aims of the Italian government's southern development policy had been 'to "italianise" the obstinate Sards and their centuries-old local culture' (Hospers & Benneworth, 2005 as quoted in Hepburn 2009b: 599) and critiqued the 'ruling politicians' on the basis that they '[had] siphoned off the regional funds to strengthen their own party bases' (Hepburn 2009b: 599).

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[62] A whole school of social research emerged as a result, seen notably in journals such as the *Rivista Economica del Mezzogiorno*. The Cassa was eventually disbanded in 1984.

Part of the problem, according to Eve Hepburn lay in the increasingly unclear position of the PSd'Az which ended up playing an ancillary role in regional government as a main ally of the centrist Christian Democrats (DC) which headed every regional government from 1949 until the 1980s and succeeded in establishing itself as the main autonomist party. The PSd'Az's alliance with the DC cemented the view that there was an 'entrenched regional political class […] strongly linked to, and highly dependent on, Rome' (Hepburn 2009b: 599) and that the Sardist party was merely an extension or facilitator of the interests of an Italian political 'establishment'; an image that it has struggled to shake off to this day.

The push away from the Sardism and autonomism of the PSd'Az contributed to the rise of what is often termed 'neo-sardism' (Hepburn 2009b: 600) which took wind in the late 1960s with the split of the PSd'Az between an 'autonomist' faction in favour of federalism and an 'independentist' faction in search of political and economic 'emancipation'. The turn towards independentism reflected long-standing issues around the relationship between Sardinia and Italy and pointed to a movement still shaped by the persistence of economic, cultural and political cleavages and the rejection of a Sardinian political class with close ties to Italian central government. The move led by the charismatic Antonio Simon Mossa in 1967 went hand-in-hand with the development of a left-wing anti-colonial movement inspired by the revolutionary spirit of 1968 (Ortu 1998: 67), and focused on issues of Sardinian culture and language, two areas which had been relatively underdeveloped by the Sardist movement. The favouring of an 'independentist' position, particularly by those more to the Left of the movement represented a more overt rejection of the conservative approaches of autonomist parties tied to the failed policies imposed by central government such as the Rebirth Plans and thereby offered a new horizon for the potential resolution of Sardinia's structural problems via the establishment of an 'independent' Sardinian state.

The anti-colonialist shift was fuelled in part by anti-militarist protests against the development of the Pratobello military base in Orgosolo (Ortu 1998: 66). As noted by Pala:

> 'the rise in emigration of young Sardinians […] an industry that never looked like it was going to take off, banditry and kidnapping which re-remerged in the interior of the island, the plague of youth suicide, the militarisation of large zones created the equation of Sardinia = colony' (Own translation of Pala 2016: 86).

Various publications such as Eliseo Spiga's *Sardegna: rivolta contro la colonizzazione* (Cabitza 1968) and the *Su Populu Sardu* journal emerged, the latter of which was organised by a newly established student-led group of the same name, eventually splintering from the PSd'Az and forming parties such as Sardigna Natzione Indipendentzia (SNI) in 1994 (Hepburn 2009b: 600).

During this time, activists also organized the Città-Campagna Circle which placed renewed emphasis on the question of class, expanding the movement across rural areas in strategies that sought to create a unifying political cause (Ortu 1998: 67). New groups such as Fronte di Liberazione della Sardegna and Fronte Indipendentista Sardo were formed, seven members of which were arrested and accused of crimes against the state (Pala 2016: 88). Despite the setback, the independentist ferment nevertheless exerted considerable influence over the Sardist movement, helping to put renewed pressure on the PSd'Az to move towards the Left and adopt an independentist position in 1981 (Hepburn 2009b: 600). The shift in position and leadership of the popular pro EU politician Mario Melis in 1982 proved electorally advantageous and the party's vote share increased to 15% (Hepburn 2009b: 600). Melis became President of the Region in 1982 and 1984-89, as well as EU parliamentary representative of the joint European constituency of Sardinia and Sicily (Hepburn 2009b: 601).

Table 1. Left-Right Alignment of parties/collectives/factions mentioned

Left-leaning parties/factions/collectives	**Centre/Non-Aligned parties/factions/collectives**	**Right-leaning parties/factions/collectives**
-A Manca pro S'Indipendentzia (AMPSI) -Caminera Noa -Città-Campagna Circle -Indipendèntzia Repùbrica de Sardigna (iRS) -Fronte Indipendentista Unidu (FIU) -Lìberos Rispetados Uguales (LibeRU) -Progetu Repùblica de Sardigna (ProgRES) -Rossomori (RM) -Sa Domu (SD) -Sardigna Natzione Indipendentzia (SNI) -Sardinia Libera (SL) -Su Populu Sardu (SPS)	-Fronte Indipendentista Sardo (FIS) -Partito dei Sardi (PdS) -Progetto Autodeterminatzione (PA) -Unidos (U)	-Partito Sardo d'Azione (PSd'Az) (although historically has also been left-leaning)

Please note that these lists are by no means exhaustive and represent some of the most significant independentist parties/factions/collectives.

Over the past 20 years the movement has continued to be plagued by questions around direction, left-right positioning and divides between those favouring a federal solution and those seeking an independentist alternative. In the case of the most successful Sardist party, the PSd'Az, the turn to the centre-Left would only last, until 2009 when the PSd'Az entered into an alliance with the Right coalition led by Berlusconi's Il Popolo di Libertà, contributing to the split and formation of the left-wing socialist Red Moors (RM) party. The early 2000s brought significant changes to the political scene and a new approach to the Sardinian question focused on pacifism and non-nationalism, non-collaboration with Italian parties, environmentalism and fiscal control, and culminated in the formation of Indipendèntzia Repùbrica de Sardigna (IRS) as well as the pursuit of an increasingly pro-autonomy platform by regional wings of Italian left and right-wing parties (Hepburn 2009b: 611-612).

IRS struggled to gain comparable support as the PSd'Az in subsequent elections, however, its influence on Sardinian independentist discourse cannot be overstated, bringing forward what has largely been perceived as a fresh alternative to Sardist debates that responded to new challenges of a globalized world and the neoliberal policies adopted by Italian parties on both the Left and Right at the time. The party helped cement 'independentism' in the island's political landscape as a primarily Leftist ideal that represents not only an 'end' objective but also an alternative to the political approaches of parties such as the PSd'Az as well as the economic programmes of neoliberal expansion that have intensified class inequality throughout Italy and Sardinia and which contributed to the severity of the 2008 financial crash[63].

A new party, Progetu Repùblica de Sardigna (ProgRES) replaced IRS as the new voice of independentism in 2011, providing a continuation to a strictly pacifist and independentist approach. Whilst not explicitly defining itself on the Left, the party's manifesto sets out a commitment to emancipation, freedom of expression, internationalism, human rights, democracy and the creation of a Sardinian republic (ProgRES n.d. b). They reject any 'economic, productive, and commercial activity that is based on indiscriminate and environmentally unsustainable exploitation' (ProgRES n.d. b) and have been active in anti-fascist circles. The party has done much better electorally than IRS, and in the regional elections of 2014 helped lead the Sardegna Possibile coalition which got 6.77% of the vote (see table 2).

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[63] According to figures published in Pruna (2013: 9), 1.1 million Italians lost their jobs between 2008 and 2013. In Sardinia the amount was 224,000, a striking figure when compared to the island's total population of 1.2 million inhabitants.

Table 2. Regional Election Results 2014

Coalition (Independentist parties in bold)	**Vote share (independentist party vote share)**
The Centre-Left Coalition: Candidate for the Presidency was Francesco Pigliaru from the PD. It comprised: PD, Sinistra Ecologia Libertà, **PdS**, **RM**, Centro Democratico, Rifondazione Comunisti Italiani Sinistra Sarda, Partito Socialista Italiano, Unione Popolare Cristiana, **IRS,** Italia dei Valori, La Base Sardegna Arbau	42.45% (6.15%)
Fronte indipendentista unidu (FIU) led by Pier Franco Devias	0.7%
Unidos: Candidate for presidency was Mauro Pili. Comprised: Unidos, Forza Paris, Soberania	5.47%
The Centre-Right coalition: Candidate for presidency was Ugo Capellacci from Forza Italia. Comprised: Forza Italia Sardegna, Riformatori Sardi Liberali Democratici, **PSd'Az**, Fratelli d'italia Centrodestra Nazionale, Partito Unione dei Sardi, **Movimento Sardegna Zona Franca** (MZF)	43.89% (6.31%)
Sardegna Possibile coalition: Presidency candidate was Michela Murgia. Comprosed: **ProgRES, Gentes, Comunidades**	6.77%

(Data taken from the Sardinian Regional government site, available at: http://www.regione.sardegna.it/index.php?xsl=2187&s=1&v=9&c=11988&t=1&tb=11625&st=20&opt=risultati_riassuntivi&t=1&tb=11625&st=20) and accessed 23rd January 2020.

Since then, a further split from ProgRES and the PSd'Az led to the establishment of the liberal Partito dei Sardi (PdS) in 2013 by a previous PSd'Az politician, Paolo Giovanni Maninchedda, and founding figure of IRS and ProgRES, Franciscu Sedda, who together published the manifesto 'L'Indipendenza della Sardegna: Per Cambiare e Governare il Presente'. Along with the RM, both parties have adopted a more softened approach towards independence, collaborating with the Italian centre-left. Interestingly, they have both brought the term of 'sovereignty' into greater circulation. In the case of the RM under slogans such as 'soberania est indipendentzia', 'sovereignty is independence' (Mureddu n.d.) and in the case of the PdS in documents such as its manifesto which posits a: 'Sardinian government that puts in place real, honest, courageous, efficient solutions that enables new steps towards sovereignty, national consciousness, and the self-determination of Sardinian people' (Maninchedda & Sedda n.d.: 2) as its main objective.

Previously sovereignty had been largely used to refer to the alignment of territory and political jurisdiction or control (Pala 2016: 138), however, with the RM and PdS, we begin to see an interpretation of the concept in less absolutist terms as something that can be contained to a particular area; economic, cultural, political (Pala 2016: 138). This brought an interesting dynamic to Sardist discourse, introducing a more overtly gradualist approach to political manoeuvre and developing a far more complex understanding and usage of sovereignty than conventional definitions of sovereignty would allow, as we shall see in the following chapters.

Where activists have tended to converge is in a rejection of a 'nationalist' label. Whilst the majority of Sardist parties have been steadfast in their insistence on Sardinia constituting a nation with its own cultural, economic and political particularities, many have sought to move away from the term nationalist due to its association with violent, culturally exclusive, or in the terms of one interviewee, 'chauvinist' narratives of belonging. Examples of this rejection of nationalism can be seen in ProgRES' manifesto where it states that:

> 'We are culturally open, socially inclusive and opposed to nationalism, by considering nationalism and ethnic, cultural or social discrimination as sources of violence, conflict, poverty in a material and immaterial sense. We reject any form of cultural essentialism, any imposition of a rigid and static identity, preferring instead the sense of widespread belonging and a dynamic process of collective identification, aimed at the present and the future.' (ProgRES n.d. b)

Recent debates within the movement have continued to raise concerns of inequality, lack of representation and adherence to the laws laid out in the Statute. The 2008 crisis brought a new wave of unemployment and poverty in Sardinia, and the highly centralized austerity measures pursued by the centre-Left Democratic Party (PD) added fuel to calls for a more radical transformation of Sardinian politics, particularly amongst left-wing socialist factions critical of the neoliberal policies implemented by the Italian right and left (Pruna 2013). Figures published in 2016 by the Centre of North and South Economic Research, showed that Sardinia was amongst the 65 poorest regions in the EU (CRENOS 2018) and pointed to the ongoing effects of a still significant wealth and infrastructural gap between the island and Italy's northern and central regions. In 2017, the employment rate in Sardinia was 38.7% compared to the 44.2% national average and 49.4% in Northern and Central Regions (CRENOS 2018: 43).

Over the past few decades, the island's economy has increasingly centred around commerce, the service sector and the highly seasonal tourism sector, reflecting the historic move away from agriculture and industry in the region (CRENOS 2018)[64]. The largest export in 2017, however, continued to be refined petroleum products and the island still hosts some of the Mediterranean's largest oil refineries such as the SARAS plant near Sarroch which has been heavily condemned for the high levels of pollution it produces (Zibechi 2019). The same report noted a significant increase in arms and munition exports between 2013 and 2017, an issue which has been at the heart of recent anti-militarist mobilization amongst independentists many of whom have continued to develop the anti-colonial critique of the neo-sardist period.

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[64] 54.6% of Sardinians in work were employed in the service sector with 22.7% working specifically in tourism (CRENOS 2018: 48). The same report noted that only 9.7% worked in industry and 6.1% in the agricultural sector (ibid).

Indeed, at the time of conducting fieldwork, a particularly lively political community centred around the anti-fascist activism of the anti-militarist group A Foras, and the student-led occupation of Sa Domu (Sard for 'the house'). Whilst not representing political parties, these groups have constituted important centres of activity and gathering, much like the anti-colonial circles of the 1960s, helping to organize large anti-military protests that bring together activists from many independentist parties and associations such as ProgRES, IRS, SNI, LiberRU, Sardigna Libera, and Caminera Noa. Opposition to the military bases has unified many factions of the independentist movement, symbolic as it is of the failure of the Italian and regional government to take Sardinian claims for self-determination seriously and adopt a political approach that fundamentally goes against commitments to pacifism. Sardinia currently holds a number of military bases and testing ranges covering an estimated 35,000 hectares of land, amongst which are Teulada and Quirra. Salto di Quirra is one of the largest military ranges in Europe, used for arms testing that have caused environmental devastation and increase in illnesses such as tumours and cancers amongst the populations neighbouring the ranges (A Foras n.d.). The ranges have been used by NATO forces to test missiles and for the testing and use of weapons such as drones.

The association of Sa Domu was established in 2014 after student protesters occupied a disused university building with the aim of creating a space for cultural exchange and political discussion. Whilst members do not define their objectives as independentist in part due to a desire to create an inclusive and radical left-wing movement, many of its key advocates nevertheless support independence and the group has been behind a great deal of mobilisation related to the military firing ranges, the Catalan referendum, and regional investment projects along with other small cultural and political associations in Cagliari such as the Circolo Me-Ti, which currently organises a range of Sard courses, employment advice services in one of Cagliari's low income 'popular' neighbourhoods. These organizations have helped create a thriving network of political activists on the left and have played an active role in the maintenance of an anti-colonial network in Sardinia, representing in some respects a continuation of the far-left wing of the movement which had been largely disbanded in 2006, following the arrest of A Manca Pro S'Indipendentzia (AMpsI) activists by police on subversion counts (Pala 2016: 90).

More recently, the movement as a whole has seen increasing calls for the development of a cross-party independentist alliance in order to address the highly fractured nature of the movement, spread as it is across many small parties and factions. We saw this first in 2014 with the formation of the Sardegna Possibile coalition which included parties such as ProgRES and sought to create a wider independentist alternative (Pala 2016: 297) and later in 2017 of the Progetto Autodeterminatzione coalition, later named Autodeterminatzione, which in its inception included SNI, the RM, IRS, LibeRU, and a newly established association called SARDOS with the aim of creating an independentist pole. Other attempts at creating more unified platform includes the Corona de Logu assembly, named after the main legislative body of the judicates, which seeks to bring independentist town councillors together in order to promote issues of common interest.

In recent years, the PSd'Az has nevertheless continued to occupy a central position in regional politics. The last regional elections in 2019 saw the PSd'Az leader Christian Solinas[65] win a total of 47.8% of the vote, with the PSd'Az getting a 9.9% share of the vote and the election of Christian Solinas as President of the Region (see table 2) in Salvini's right-win coalition. The latter incudes the Lega, Forza Italia, the autonomist Riformatori Sardi, Fratelli d'Italia, signalling a definitive passage of the PSd'Az to the right, itself symptomatic of the increasing popularity of the far-Right Lega throughout Italy more generally. The Right of the movement as seen with the PSd'Az has tended to adopt a pro-market approach and a push for greater liberalization of the island's market through the creation of 'free ports' and tax relief. Amongst the most notable advocates of this argument have been small parties such as Movimento Zona Franca which have focused not on the issue of independence but on the creation of free-trading ports in Sardinia. These groups on the right such as Fortza Paris, however, tend to adhere to a federalist approach and autonomist position as opposed to an outright independentist position.

Table 3. Regional Election Results 2019

Coalition (Independentist parties in bold)	**Vote share (independentist party vote share)**
The Centre-Right Coalition. President Candidate was Chistian Solinas (PSd'Az). Included: the Lega Salvini - Sardegna, **PSd'Az**, Forza Italia, the Riformatori Sardi,	51.87% (9.86%)

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[65] Current leader of the PSd'Az.

Fratelli d'Italia, Sardegna20venti, Pro Sardinia, Sardegna Civica, Forza Paris, amongst others	
Centre-Left led by the PD. Candidate for presidency was Massimo Zedda. Included PD, Liberu e Uguali Sardigna Zedda Presidente, Campo Progressista Sardegna, Noi, la Sardegna con Massimo Zedda, amongst others	30.06%
5 Star Movement. Candidate for presidency was Grancesco Desogus	9.74%
Partito dei Sardi. Candidate for presidency was Paolo Giovanni Maninchedda	3.67%
The Sardi Liberi coalition. Candidate for presidency was Mauro Pili. Comprised: **Unidos** and **ProgRES**	2.13%
Autodeterminatzione coalition. Candidate for presidency was Andrea Murgia.	1.8%

(Data taken from Repubblica, available at: https://elezioni.repubblica.it/2019/elezioni-regionali/sardegna and accessed 23rd January 2020).

4.5 Concluding Thoughts

The aim of this brief historical outline has been to firstly, offer an overview of the development of the Sardinian National Question and independentist movement, secondly, to draw attention to some contributing factors that have shaped the emergence of Sardism and finally, to introduce the main parties and factions encountered in the field and some key conceptual discussions amongst proponents of the Sardinian independence cause. In line with the Gramscian perspective set out in Chapter 3, the overview draws attention to important contextual features that help us appreciate some of the peculiarities and contributing factors behind the Sardinian case. Echoing Gramsci's critique of unification, historical accounts suggest that the emergence of a distinctly Sardinian national cause went hand in hand with highly repressive policies of economic expropriation and policing similar to those that had contributed to the Southern Question more widely. Rather than signalling a radical transformation to social relations, Italian unification in many ways contributed to a restoration and conservation of class hierarchies through the removal of access to land and highly racialized discourses of Sardinian criminality and inferiority. Sardinia's early inclusion within the Italian national project was partly facilitated by a Sardinian land-owning class and bourgeoisie which largely adhered to Piedmontese rule in the hopes of establishing a closer relationship with Turin for greater customs access, through the creation of a class alliance or bloc and large pay offs at the expense of the peasant communities which made up the majority of the population.

Crucially, what this analysis indicates is that calls for Sardinian autonomy and independence emerged directly in response to the highly unequal effects of these processes of centralization and the limits of Italy's 'abnormal' hegemony predicated as it was on a popular vacuum in a Gramscian sense. The legacies of a centre-periphery cleavage are still be visible today in the discourses and political strategies adopted by activists and in the conflicts within the movement itself over the objectives and directions pursued by independentists. Indeed, we can draw important parallels between these debates and the disagreements that took place a century ago over the approach adopted by Sardists, the significance on the adoption of a class critique and the nature of the relationship between Sardinia and the Italian state. A particularly significant source of discord has arisen out of the perceived transformist capabilities of centralized Italian government and the failures of the autonomy project which in the eyes of many activists has merely signalled a continuation of historic clientelist relations through the establishment of an enduring regional wing of Italian parties such as the DC, the PD and more recently the 5-star Movement and the right-wing Forza Italia. This view was particularly significant for activists who stressed that independentism was a fundamentally Left-wing cause and who rooted the fight for national independence within a longer trajectory of political struggle with an elitist Italian national project.

As we shall see in the following chapters, an appreciation of these debates and this historic struggle is crucial in our understanding of sovereignty's definition intertwined as it is with these long-standing concerns surrounding the failures of unification and the constraining effects of dynamics of passive revolution and uneven development characteristic of Sardinia's politically and economically fraught insertion within Italy. Sovereignty's definition by activists in the field and the ways in which respondents problematized conventional readings indicated the ongoing relevance of many of the issues here delineated, emphasizing the need for accounts that make room for such historic conditions and antagonisms in our analyses of sovereignty's definition. The next chapter unpacks sovereignty's formulation by providing an overview of activist conceptualizations which help us appreciate the ways in which activists problematized clear-cut statist notions of territorial power, rationality and boundedness. Crucially, it emphasizes the importance of making room for the complex ways in which sovereignty was understood and used by activists as well as the situated and relational nature of its invocation as not simply an expression of the exercise of discursive selection but a reflection of the structuring effects of already-existing social conditions and relations informing what activists did and did not do with sovereignty.

Chapter 5: Doing Sovereignty

> ‘A very common error is that of thinking that every social stratum elaborates its consciousness and its culture in the same way, with the same methods, that is, with the methods of professional intellectuals […] It is illusory to think that a well propagated “clear idea” enters diverse consciousness with the same “organizing” effects of widespread clarity. It is an “enlightenment” error […] the same ray of light passes through different prisms and yields different refractions of light: in order to have the same refraction, one must make a whole series of adjustments to the individual prisms.’
>
> (Gramsci 1992: 128)

5.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to provide an initial response to the first research question, namely, how Sardinian independentists defined sovereignty and outlines some of the varying ways in which activists described and used the term. This will be important later on when we examine in closer depth what these kinds of claims tell us about the political projects and conditions shaping independentist conceptualizations of sovereignty. Crucially, the provision of a rough overview of activists’ uses and definitions is also necessary for an appreciation of how the term is far from accepted by Sardinian nationalists, and how the divisions emerging from differences in interpretation are indications of contrasting and converging ways of viewing sovereignty as political form or strategy i.e. as a way of *doing* politics.

Through an analysis of fieldwork interviews and notes, the chapter argues that activists did not interpret sovereignty in either/or terms but indicated what post-structuralist IR commentators such as Cynthia Weber have described as an ‘and/or’ logic of signification (2016). Whilst activists still largely accepted sovereignty in principle as an ethical or political ideal, many of those interviewed were also quick to point to sovereignty’s ambiguity and the limits of an either/or binary that seemed implicit in ‘conventional’ formulations. Respondents frequently described sovereignty in terms of its strategic quality and its capacity to carve out avenues for recognition and manoeuvre, suggesting that they did not only view it in either/or terms as exclusively referring to x or y but often considered it in a more multifaceted way as referring to both x and y. Sovereignty was not just a point through which activists differentiated themselves from others within and outside the movement but it was also a means through which they expressed a critique of Sardinian ‘politics’ more broadly.

In keeping with the Gramscian approach laid out thus far, the purpose of this chapter is to begin to situate activists’ converging and diverging definitions of sovereignty within a dialectical approach that considers discourse formation as a productive process that reflects a necessary relationship between signification and the material conditions in which we articulate. The notion of dialectical here is not understood as denoting a teleological process of progression as the superseding of A to B but captures the mutually defining relationship identified by Gramsci and discussed previously, between structure and superstructure, through an approach that regards them as constitutive elements of social relations and, crucially, of the very production of politics.

The chapter shows how activist readings of the term denoted a much more complex process of signification than ordinarily admitted in discussions about nationalism and sovereignty in IR. Crucially, it explores some important implications of the main approaches to sovereignty encountered in the field; namely, 1) the need for the development of conceptual and methodological approaches that are able to capture logics such as the and/or, an area which realist and some critical approaches such as historical materialist IR scholarship have struggled to capture. And 2) the need for approaches that not only place sufficient weight on the analysis of discursive formulation as a political doing but which simultaneously considers the constitutive role played by discourse's necessary materiality as inextricably linked to concrete social conditions, something which post-structuralist accounts have often lost sight of. By separating discursive formulations of sovereignty from the material conditions within which they emerge, we are not only at a loss to explain *why* activists might understand sovereignty in and/or ways but we risk missing important nuances implicit in such understandings and worse, reproducing reductive analyses that undermine the kinds of claims made by respondents. The chapter argues for a Gramscian approach that combines a concern with both discursive articulation as a political praxis *and* its historicism as the reflection of the 'determinancy' of social relations of production (Hall 1986b).

To begin, the chapter briefly reflects on activists' emphasis on the constructedness of the national project. It draws links between their shared sense of the contingency of independentist discourse and the ways in which they understood and defined sovereignty. The chapter then proceeds to provide an overview of the primary framings of sovereignty encountered, namely: (1) 'conventional' sovereignty; (2) 'external' sovereignty; (3) graduated sovereignty; and finally, (4) sovereignty as political spin. It is worth noting that very often activists did not exclusively favour one interpretation or another, but often incorporated various readings into their definitions. This is important to consider in order to recognize the and/or nature of sovereignty claims amongst Sardinian activists. The idea is not to foreclose nationalists' treatments of sovereignty but to point to some of the ways in which the concept's limited fluidity manifested during interviews in addition to examining how activists problematized absolutist notions of sovereignty.

The chapter ends with an analysis of the implications these characterizations have for how we interpret the concept and the extent to which these are informed by an understanding of sovereignty as political *doing*. I maintain that an appreciation of sovereignty's contested definition needs to go further than a framing that sees it purely as discursive selection, to one that considers it alongside wider structural limits on political organization integral to contemporary forms of statehood and nationality. The appeal to and/or formulations reflected a desire and the perceived restriction to respond to existing conditions of political possibility. The imaginaries that accompanied this desire to insert and/or contest existing social relations reflected understandings of the political that did not necessarily abide by the neat boundaries often drawn between intra-state and inter-state politics but which nevertheless spoke of the structuring effects of state practice and global configurations of power and recognition in the manifestation of potential action. As the following two chapters show, in many cases it was *because* of these existing concrete and constraining social relations that activists often walked the ambiguous line between the and/or.

5.2 Constructing a 'Shared' Project

Nationalism scholars (amongst the most notable Anderson 2006; Billig 1995; Breuilly 1993; Gellner & Breuilly 2006; Greenfield 1992; Hobsbawm 2013; Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012; Kedourie 1993; Smith 1986) have long considered nationalism's constructed nature as a means through which collective imaginaries have been established, reproduced, or reassembled. Whether they position themselves within primordialist, ethnosymbolist or modernist[66] camps, there is a widespread appreciation of the *practical* nature of nationalist discourse as something that is lived, mobilized, felt and highly politicized:

> ''Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent ...political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality' (Gellner as quoted in Hobsbawm 2013: 10).

As we have seen, Gramsci too displayed a sensitivity to the significance of nationalism's constructed nature through frequent reflections on the role played by literature, music, and the press[67] as means through which people developed or articulated a shared sense of a 'national – popular will'. As we considered in the previous chapter, he frequently examined the elitist and often particularist ways in which Italian national identity was developed during the Risorgimento, often attributing the weaknesses of the Italian national project to its selective attempts to produce a unifying account of Italian identity that did not adequately make space for the intensely varied experiences of populations across the peninsula and islands[68]: 'the men of the Risorgimento were, in reality, the greatest demagogues: they turned the people-nation into an instrument, degrading it' (Gramsci 1992: 208-209).

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[66] For a comprehensive analysis of these differing approaches see Smith (1998). Main sources of divergence between approaches lies in the extent to which they consider nations and nationalism as modern phenomena or indications of collective descent and in some cases even genetic ties.

Minority nationalisms are certainly no exception to this process of selection. Indeed, whilst virtually all activists I engaged with in Sardinia viewed Sardinian national identity as culturally and historically rooted, many were also very explicit about a need to promote and foster a national sense of identity amongst Sardinians more widely in order to progress the independence cause. When asked what the main obstacle facing the movement was, a number of respondents mentioned national consciousness. One activist referenced the well-known Sardinian anthropologist and independentist Bachisio Bandinu: 'Sardinians don't have an identity. They need to learn who they are.'

This awareness was particularly marked in one of the first events I attended whilst in Sardinia which had been organized by a newly established group called SARDOS[69]. One of the main speakers of the 'association' at a press conference began his speech by remarking on a 'common' characteristic of the Sardinian people, namely, a reluctance to engage with the 'political' which was largely perceived as being corrupt and far-removed from their daily experiences and needs. According to him, people's attitudes changed however, when you spoke to them about a 'vision for the future'. SARDOS had formed around this sentiment, with the objective of creating an inclusive movement, one that was the 'product of a shared project' ('frutto di un progetto condiviso') and that responded to the individualism[70] that had until then prevailed in Sardinian politics. He lamented the fact that there was a distinct lack of any 'united will to build' in Sardinia. Politics of the day was one of fighting and the last two decades had been marked by the conflict between Left and Right, which had resulted in the same kind of politics. This approach had to be reformed. Sardinians needed a political alternative aimed at the attainment of self-determination. Things *can* be changed, he stressed. Self-determination *is* achievable and the time had come to work together to create something concrete.

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[67] Examples can be found in his many notes on 'Non Popular-national Character of Italian Literature', 'Popular Literature', and 'Absence of a National-Popular Character in Italian Literature' such as Notebooks 9, 14, 15, and on newspapers and music as seen in Notebooks 9, 14, 24 available in Italian at: http://www.gramsciproject.org/quaderni-del-carcere/.

[68] For examples see: 1992: 136-151, 161-162, 199-200, 228-229, 328; 1996: 39, 44-46, 80-82, 2007: 80, 245-246, 256, 257-258

[69] As it later transpired, the group SARDOS went onto become a central member group in the Progetto Autodeterminatzione coalition and the formation of the Independentist 'pole' at the general elections in 2019. The coalition was touted by many as representing a historic moment, the beginning of a new form of independentist politics that prized unity over division and that emulated the success of the Catalan secessionist alliance of Junts pel Sí. Others were less enthusiastic about it, seeing it as more concerned with electoral politics and not offering the kind of inclusive groundwork that the movement needed.

[70] Personalismo was also used which is defined as 'excessive interest in one's self or personal issues' (Corriere della Sera n.d.) and in English could loosely be translated to individualism. It was, however, understood and used in much more negative terms as the favouring of particular individuals within the movement.

The speaker's calls for a new type of politics were characteristic of the ways in which many Sardinian activists viewed the 'political' as something made and unmade. His description of the association's aims referred to construction, to the need to build an alternative that responded to the failures of the island's political class. In a similar way, most independentists I spoke to were often interested in making the case for *their* particular view of the national question whilst discarding those of opposing factions. There was an acceptance, if not direct appeal to the malleability and functionality of discursive framings by activists themselves. In the case of the speaker, for example, the formation of a political alternative needed to go hand in hand with a turn to the creation of collectively shared visions for the future. Self-determination is 'praticabile', i.e. doable, thus denoting something that can and crucially in this case, should be enacted. Moreover, rupture from politics-as-usual and the empty Left-Right binary necessitated a renewed process of collective discourse formation in order to reflect the Sardinian people's will and overcome the widespread alienation and scepticism described.

This awareness amongst activists of the very deliberate processes involved in the development of independentist discourse is important for the study at hand, indicating some of the shared ways in which activists defined their claims to sovereignty. As we shall see, many were highly aware of both the ambiguity and utility of sovereignty's definition. One of my early interviewees, a well-known figurehead of ProgRES described it as 'ampio', meaning 'broad'. 'It doesn't always mean something specific […] It's clearer in English. In Italy, it has a different meaning […] It is a manipulated word' used by groups with contrasting interests (Marco). He gave the particular example of unionist versus federalist definitions and claimed that we can think about sovereignty in multiple ways; as 'autogoverno', i.e. self-governance, and in the sense of being part of an 'emancipatory path'. In a more ambivalent vein, another interviewee passionately claimed: 'you can call it independence, you can call it autonomy, you can call it whatever, it doesn't matter!' (Antonello). For him, all these terms, including sovereignty, amounted to the basic need to have the freedom to do what was necessary to improve Sardinia's political and economic condition.

Both of these accounts point to a central tension implicit in many of the characterizations of sovereignty encountered in the field and which stemmed from an understanding of sovereignty as *relational,* i.e. as reflective of relations between actors and relational in the sense that it was connected to particular social conditions. Indeed, whilst it was regularly described in favourable terms as representing a political ideal for an oppressed Sardinian nation, it was nonetheless perceived by many as being symbolic of a particular *way* of framing the national question and of approaching independentist mobilization. Depending on who you spoke to, sovereignty could be understood as something that could be progressively attained within a wider struggle for national self-determination; as a way of delineating the validity of activists' framings of the independence debate and delegitimizing those of 'opposing' factions; as a way of building a political and economic alternative for Sardinia, amongst others. What unified most of these treatments, was an awareness of sovereignty's utility as something that could be moulded in accordance with activists' political visions, thus echoing post-structuralist accounts as considered in Chapter 2 such as Weber's notion of 'simulated sovereignty' as an ideal that 'is written' in order to not only 'speak' in the name of a stable 'sovereign', but also to 'draw boundaries between that which is within the sovereign jurisdiction' (Weber 1994: 28). The term's framing reflected a political choice, a performative means through which they legitimized specific and exclusionary readings of what counts as a Sardinian sovereign nation and Sardinian independentism. However, unlike the practices of signification identified by Weber in which the simulation of sovereignty occurs in part through its naturalization and omission of what is being excluded (Weber 1994), activists' often explicit appreciation of the flexibility of such readings disrupted this attempt to naturalize and instead highlighted sovereignty's constitution as a political act.

This is not to say that a territorial understanding of sovereignty as a requirement for statehood was not equally pervasive. However, this view was often understood as a normative question and an approach that regarded the pursuit of sovereignty as also constituting an ethical necessity that would respond to stark inequalities and cultural repression. Activists were often tied by a common conviction in the pursuit of political alternatives that enabled a freer expression of their 'sardità', 'Sardinian-ness', and a belief in the independence cause as a way of addressing Sardinia's deep political and economic cleavages. When understood in relation to this wider attempt to unify, sovereignty referred primarily to a necessary collaborative form of political manoeuvre and contestation. It reflected an attempt to appeal to 'international' configurations of power and community and the structuring influence of the state as an important relational unity in contemporary political praxis.

Attitudes towards how to define sovereignty did not always reflect neat lines between class interests or ideological Left-Right positioning, and in many respects reflected the peculiar relationship nationalism has had with class, as a political discourse that has historically served elite *and* subaltern interests as a unifying (not just exclusionary) discourse of collective belonging. The accounts here considered include activists from right, centre-right 'autonomist' groups such Movimento Zona Franca (MZF), Right independentist parties such as the PSd'Az, Left- centre-left parties such as PdS, ProgRES, and socialist, anarchist factions associated with parties such as Liber.RU and the anti-militarist movements of Sa Domu (SD) and A Foras (AF).

The following sections outline some of the recurring ways in which interviewees described sovereignty that indicate the prevalence of an and/or logic that emerges from a notion of sovereignty as a form of political action. These classifications are not meant to be prescriptive or all-encompassing but merely reflect some common themes in activists' descriptions of sovereignty. We begin with a brief examination of what I have termed 'conventional' framings of sovereignty amongst activists that reflected the persistence of realist definitions of sovereignty that framed the latter in state-centric terms. An appreciation of the ways in which this definition manifested in the field will be important later on when we explore the ways in which activists also critiqued the absolutist and static implications of these conventional formulations. The section also contrasts it with a much more pervasive framing that emphasized international recognition and participation.

5.3 Conventional Sovereignty and External Sovereignty

A number of the activists I interviewed defined or otherwise alluded to 'conventional' characterizations of sovereignty that placed emphasis on sovereignty's internal constitution as the capacity for exclusive decision-making, territorial, and political control in the name of a legitimate and unified 'popular', 'national' or 'Sardinian' authority. Examples of this framing included definitions such as:

> 'when a people can decide on the internal issues affecting its territory' (Giancarlo);
>
> 'the capacity of a community that recognizes itself as a people to exercise self-governance' (Andrea);
>
> 'the possibility of deciding autonomously without a dominating force' (Antonio);
>
> when 'the Sardinian people are free to govern itself autonomously' (Federico);
>
> 'taking back government of one's own land' (Francesca).

Reference by activists to phrases such as *a* community, *the* Sardinian people, territory, self-governance, autonomously, internal, and so forth, suggested a significance attached to the notion of a bordered political space and unitary entity when thinking about sovereignty. Implicit in these descriptions was the presupposition of the possibility for the establishment of a rational and unitary political actor that could function as a unifying voice or authority of a national collective. Activists were often unwavering in their belief in the intrinsic rightness of Sardinian sovereignty, attaching to it a universal and static quality that in some respects mirrored the normative contentions underpinning realist formulations of the term that treat sovereignty as a universal and necessary feature of international action. State sovereignty was not only a political ideal but it constituted an ethical and juridical imperative, denoting 'Sardinian people's right to decide its destiny' (Antonio). Lorenzo who was at the time a member of the regional council, referred to sovereignty's legalistic roots in juridical theory and practice, contrasting it with autonomy and independence both of which he considered movements as opposed to principles:

> 'In constitutional doctrine, sovereignty has always been an element of statehood, not a movement […] Constitutional doctrine teaches us that for there to be a state, you need three elements: a territory, a people that lives in that territory, and the sovereignty of the people within the territory […] means having statehood in order to relate to the rest of the world, deciding on one's territory and what its politics should be'.

Sovereignty's strict connection to statehood, as well as its association with 'territorial' boundaries delineated clear internal and external dimensions of political decision-making. Lorenzo was keen to stress its constituting a juridical notion, an accepted norm of state structuring as opposed to a constructed and politically mobilized concept. He was not alone in this assessment. Others such as Giancarlo, from the left-wing Sardigna Natzione Indipendentzia (SNI), similarly framed sovereignty around clear internal/external binaries, passionately and resolutely describing sovereignty as:

> 'when a people can decide on the internal issues affecting its territory and people. When it has exclusive decision making over its relations, over its internal political, economic and cultural dynamics, as well as its external dynamics. In the sense that, we're not interpreting sovereignty as isolation, living alone in the world. Absolutely not! We ask for exclusive competence over what concerns our territory, and also over how to engage with the rest of the world, especially in this case we cannot act as if Europe doesn't exist'.

Much like Lorenzo, for Giancarlo, sovereignty constituted the capacity to make decisions regarding a 'territory's' internal prerogatives whilst also enabling interaction with those outside its confines. Sovereignty denoted a condition of territorial control and self-determination, and the capacity of communities to act as unitary decision-making entities, denoting exclusive power over territory and a basic condition for interaction with an ‘outside’. Giancarlo never questioned the possibilities for ‘exclusive decision-making’ in this particular exchange, even if he was quick to emphasize the importance of the international dimension and the Sardinian movement’s openness to the European Union. His use of ‘exclusive’ reflected a zero-sum approach to sovereignty which meant that you are either sovereign or you are not, echoing the non-interventionist premises central to realist definitions of state sovereignty.

Lorenzo and Giancarlo’s definitions of sovereignty were, however, pretty rare. Indeed, even those who initially defined or characterized sovereignty along these conventional lines including Lorenzo, often veered away from such neat depictions of intra/inter-state politics and decision-making throughout interview exchanges, with many signalling their openness to an ‘international’ dimension of practice and firmly stating their opposition to a nationalist discourse of ‘closure’ and ‘isolation’. Such framings that focused on sovereignty’s external constitution tied into the kinds of sovereignty definitions outlined in European minority nationalist literature[71] that have drawn attention to activists’ increased rejection of essentialist discourses of national identity and practice and the adoption or more internationalist outlooks that find merit in the pooling of political power across what scholars such as Keating describe as different ‘levels’ of governance (See Keating 2014b; 2017a & 2017b). Sovereignty, in the accounts of Sardinian respondents who emphasized sovereignty’s external recognition adopted a more *strategic* approach to sovereignty that invalidated depictions of the movement as insular by emphasizing the compatibility between Sardinian independentism with wider ‘international’ recognition, freedom and interconnection. Activists who favoured this characterization predominantly defined the independence cause as being one of an ‘open’ vision of European exchange. Lucia from Sardigna Libera (SL) and who initially defined sovereignty as ‘the right to decide’ swiftly stressed that there was no contradiction in terms: ‘we are internationalists […]. The two concepts can be joined perfectly, there is no contradiction’. ‘Sovereignty’ as well as ‘independence’ were regarded as being facilitators not only of self-determination but of international cooperation and recognition.

The first time I encountered this kind of characterization was in my first ever interview with Leonardo, a member of the PdS, who described sovereignty as:

> ‘the power to manage our interdependence, i.e. the possibility of entering the world with our capacity to relate to others in accordance with our priorities of building an open society, a prosperous society, a just society without having to, as we have now, shall we say, be subjected to the decisions of others. Particularly, when it comes to issues that

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[71] See pages 36-43.

> are not of global pertinence, but which are our issues. For example, territory, decisions regarding the economy, decisions regarding the model of society. I am, for example, convinced that in this path we should demonstrate that we have a more open vision than Italy, from the social point of view, from the point of view of cultural encounter. Instead, you find a fascist, xenophobic shift in Italy. I want there to be, you could say, a differentiating line, i.e. that we Sardinians distinguish ourselves because we know how to build an open nation. The idea here is to regain some capacity for control, and to demonstrate that we exist, that we are here, and that perhaps we can also say something original in a world where even small parts of humanity manage to do something good and can emerge as an example, a model. Thus, someone could say: 'but look at Sardinians, at what they have done', you know?'

Leonardo's use of the term interdependence as the central 'remit' of sovereignty alluded to the existence of an 'international' relation, an outside, and simultaneously to a more blurred connection between a mutually constitutive inside and outside. We do not see a complete renunciation of the significance of national borders and sovereignty's containment. Indeed, sovereignty's power or significance continued to lie in its delineation of borders and jurisdictions and in its enabling the production of an open politics through which Sardinia can express its identity, contribution and 'originality' on a broader global scale. Sovereignty's internal constitution is important, symbolizing greater control without being 'subject to' external decision-making. Note the use of 'our' and 'we' again implying a unified political authority.

What is particularly striking in this passage is the extent to which it gives the sense that sovereignty's establishment is made possible through the latter's recognition and acceptance by those outside its borders and crucially, outside the Italian state. Sardinia's cultural and political value is established *through* the international. It is important to also note the role an Italian politics of 'closure' plays in his move for a *new* politics of recognition. Leonardo did not merely draw attention to sovereignty's capacity to function as a mechanism for 'international' self-expression, but was also critiquing the Italian state's approach to cultural recognition. He characterized Italian politics as being 'closed' and 'xenophobic' and antagonistic to a politics of 'openness' in which minorities can be seen and valued. An international domain or arena of activity in this sense enabled a kind of political space through which Sardinians could pursue an open politics.

Framings such as Leonardo's highlighted activists' acute perceptions of the structuring limits of an 'international' dimension for the possibilities of enacting Sardinian nationhood and statehood. Sovereignty whilst representing an internationalist, open form of politics nevertheless remained a fact of the possibility for greater independence and recognition, alluding to a stark tension between the internal/external dimensions of sovereignty, with the term referring to both the capacity to make decisions 'concerning' Sardinia and to the power to relate to those outside. Indeed, others who favoured 'internationalist' characterizations of the movement and an externally constituted notion of sovereignty were quick to stress the limits posed by its external constitution and 'international' pressures. Domenico, a member of PA, embraced features of a 'conventional' framing of sovereignty but was also quick to note the need to account for the potentially limiting effects of international forces:

> 'By a sovereign and independent Sardinia, I mean its right and capacity to attain self-government, self-determination, economic and social self-management of its resources and territory […] the power in fundamental sectors such as defence and international relations, to decide with full sovereignty and autonomy. Putting the question of the Sardinian nation in these terms means, in my opinion, to think about the creation of a new state, separated from the Italian state, in which it has historically been incorporated [...]
>
> Separation does not mean isolation and closure in itself, nor that it may reject higher levels, including institutional, of integration and interdependence necessary today to deal with connected socio-economic problems on a continental and global scale, [such as]: the spread of new technologies and the globalization of the economy and markets; the increasing degree of interdependence and integration achieved by the economy of individual countries and individual areas and regions; the European and international character of the flows and exchange of raw materials, manufactured products, technologies and capital; the overwhelming importance that large economies and companies that not only produce for the local market but for wider and distant markets acquire'.

In contrast to Leonardo's description, there was a greater focus on the potential *obstacles* independence might encounter in a world of 'flows', 'exchanges', 'technologies', 'globalization', 'capital', and so forth, and the necessities of an approach to independence that could be configured within a distribution of political and economic forces that go beyond the state. It is significant that in spite of an awareness of these challenges to 'independent' or 'sovereign statehood,' Domenico was still firm in his conviction in the necessity of Sardinian independence. Sovereignty and independence were a means through which the Sardinian community would be able to exert more control and influence than at present.

These accounts pointed to flexibility in how activists approached sovereignty which often reflected both the importance of sovereignty's denotation of control and self-determination and the porosity of state boundaries. Conversely, there was also a simultaneous rigidity implicit in the position of people like Domenico surrounding the kinds of challenges facing sovereignty's manifestation. There was an acceptance of the mutually defining and necessary nature of such co-constitutive connections between the national and international. Sovereignty and the independence movement needed to respond to their situation within a wider totality of political relations and conditions of manoeuvre. We see a problematization here of the absolutism of conventional framings of sovereignty as well as an embrace of sovereignty's inherent and/or as both internally and externally established. Crucially, we begin to see in these descriptions a more explicit conception of sovereignty as representing a particular way of approaching the independence cause; sovereignty not as a static feature or principle but moving, fluid and transferable.

5.4 Graduated Sovereignty

The third characterization of sovereignty that was pervasive amongst activists was as something that could be gradually attained across different areas of activity such as the economy, language, politics, and so forth. We find in these accounts a greater problematization of sovereignty's absolutist links to statehood and an increased stress on sovereignty's strategic qualities. Similar to the previous characterization where we see concerns with limits that might inhibit the establishment of sovereignty such as 'integration' or globalization, there is a preoccupation in this kind of description with potential practical obstacles for independence's eventual instatement such as local representation, school management and so forth. Sovereignty's form becomes more ambiguous, moulding into different areas of activity within a wider move towards statehood. It becomes both a way of denoting a condition of control within these areas, as well as the practices of contestation through which the movement might attain greater political primacy within existing political and economic infrastructures.

In an early interview, prominent member of ProgRES Giuseppe initially defined sovereignty as 'the capacity to decide autonomously' but he was quick to emphasize its limits, 'it can never be a universal thing, an absolute', 'you always have to relate to others'. He maintained that it was possible to 'have sovereignty in specific areas, such as fiscal sovereignty. [It] can either be a consequence of independence or you can have [it] in bits'. Sovereignty did not refer solely to 'state', 'popular' or 'national' sovereignty, it could also be reduced to 'smaller', more specific activities and spaces. He directly drew attention to the impossibility of universal or absolute state sovereignty, explaining that it was necessary to consider its situation within a particular context and relate it to more finite domains of activity when thinking about the attainment of sovereignty strategically.

We can find a similar partitioning of sovereignty by Andrea, organizer of the association of Circolo Me-Ti, who made the following distinction between self-determination and sovereignty:

> 'self-determination is the subjective correspondence/equivalent of sovereignty, i.e. the action that individual or collective subjects, the *process* that individual or collective subjects push forth to realize forms of sovereignty' (my emphasis).

The links Andrea drew between 'individual' and 'collective' subjectivities, as well as between self-determination and sovereignty in this description situated both within a relational setting and attributed a practical dimension to the latter terms through an explicit statement of self-determination as political *process.* Whilst he did draw a distinction between sovereignty and self-determination with the former connoting a more static idea and the latter an action, the idea that sovereignty might be something progressively attained in varying 'forms' ascribed movement and transformation to sovereignty itself. It was no longer attributed to *a* sovereign but to shifting degrees and embodiments of self-determination through which individuals and/or collectives might move and exhibit legitimate authority.

These accounts tie in with literature on European minority nationalist discourse that emphasizes an increasing significance of a multi-level framework[72] within minority nationalist strategies. It is indicative of what Walker terms 'graduated nationalism' where the binary conception of state sovereignty is rejected in favour of a view of national self-determination that is 'situated along a more-or-less spectrum of institutional realization' (Walker 2018: 2). Indeed, Walker makes the distinction between 'graduated' and 'binary' approaches to nationalist mobilisation. He argues that we are currently seeing a turn towards approaches that are tied less to 'yes or no' interpretations of self-determination across movements in Europe (Walker 2018: 4), and which are more 'adjustable in the light of experience and circumstances, and knows no settled destination' (Walker 2018: 4).

This approach to sovereignty was particularly noticeable in an interview with Gabriele, a well-known member of PA and long-term activist in the socialist factions of the movement. At first, Gabriele questioned the notion that you could have different types of sovereignty arguing that much like independence, it is an absolute. He went onto say, however, that there was truth in the idea that there are 'margins of sovereignty' that need to be 'conquered' in order to attain independence:

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[72] See the work of Keating (2001), Keating & McGarry (2001); Laible (2008), Lluch (2013); McGarry & Keating (2006) and Walker (2018) for examples of this approach.

> ‘Look, the issue of sovereignty is complex because, let’s say, in the last few years, sovereignty has been treated in a limited way, as if it had levels of realization. In reality sovereignty is one. Either you’re sovereign or you’re not. In this sense, it coincides with independence. But it is also true that in a way there exist margins of sovereignty which you need to conquer en route to independence. There are moments of self-determination, moments of conquest of independence in some areas. So, they are also synonyms in the sense that you can conquer sovereignty from a linguistic, cultural point of view. Obviously in some ways also from an economic point of view, but never fully.’

The use of margins here is interesting, pointing to the significance of borders, boundaries and limits as crucial sites in which we contest spatial and temporal distributions of power. His use of margins and conquest evoked a spatial dimension, whilst his use of moments situated conquest within a temporal trajectory. Sovereignty, for Gabriele seemed to enable the gradual acquisition of political primacy through the shifting of existing institutional and political boundaries, giving the term both an absolute *and* transitory nature. Sovereignty referred to control and authority in specific areas on the way to a more complete independence. Moreover, the significance of sovereignty’s absolutist implications could still be seen, echoing Walker’s observation that within minority nationalist graduated approaches, ‘various forms of legal and institutional recognition of national identity [are taken] seriously in their own right as more or less significant measures of national self-determination’ (Walker 2018: 8). However, it is worth noting Gabriele’s observation that you can never fully conquer sovereignty from an economic point of view. We see a combined concern with both sovereignty’s practical application as political manoeuvre as well as the potential limits of this process. He went onto problematize statist sovereignty, noting the impossibilities of independence from ‘interdependence with other nations’:

> ‘you can obtain a complete sovereignty when you are independent but even then it will always be conditioned by an interdependence with other nations. Sovereignty is thus placed within a context. Therefore, one could say that we view the conquest of sovereignty as an evolution, which can be done even by applying the very autonomist statute we have today that is not being used to its full potential. At the same time we see this evolution not as an end in itself or merely as a means for the conquest of greater sovereignty, but focused on the fact that this conquest of greater spaces of sovereignty needs to be finalized towards the conquest of independence.’

There is a tension in Gabriele’s account between his attempts to question the possibilities of complete independence or sovereignty and his continued belief in the importance of attaining independence. Sovereignty is something that is approximated, ‘it is placed within a context’. The idea of sovereignty as condition continues to play an important role here, however, it also takes on a more flexible guise as a form of action or political manoeuvre within a limited context. This context is not, however, rigid or completely bound but has openings for gradual transformation. The challenge for independentists was to utilize as much sovereignty as possible in order to attain eventual 'independence':

> 'So what is our job? Our job is to try to keep going forward until we begin to insert councillors, then mayors, aim for regional administration, manage to influence by governing, changing how we organize things and allowing others to see that there is a possible path towards the construction of passages of sovereignty that can take us to independence. Passing independence from today to tomorrow in these conditions is certainly impossible.'

Here Gabriele drew attention to what his gradual conquest of sovereignty might entail, namely, insertion in local and regional bodies and governance through which they can slowly attain political primacy at a wider level. We see a concern with practical possibilities of attaining conditions of greater independence, drawing attention to the need to work within existing political bodies that can facilitate a more durable process.

Gabriele's identification of existing spaces through which Sardinian independentists could attain greater sovereignty echoed other characterizations of the term as something that is gradually attained and to what some activists termed *sovranismo*. Here the suffix ismo, much like ism, turns sovereignty into an 'action' noun, pointing to sovereignty's denotation of a process or a way of doing Sardinian independentist politics. The term sovranismo has been used widely in Italy in recent years, notably in the context of the far-right discourses of the Lega, previously the Northern League. However, as noted by Pala, the term has been around longer in Sardinia, referring to the approaches put forward by the socialist RM following their split from the PSd'Az in 2009 who for some time used sovereignty to refer to a political strategy that seeks to gradually attain greater political power or primacy through existing state infrastructure, whether that be in the form of participating in electoral politics and regional/local bodies or in the establishment of coalitions with unionist parties (Pala 2016: 243). The RM's approach to sovereignty whilst never altogether clear (Pala 2016: 247) has been tied to a strategic value placed on 'exercising a sovereign right over one or more areas that is immediately exercisable, instead of presuming to immediately attain full self-determination for the Sardinian people' (own translation Pala 2016: 247). Other parties such as the PdS have also contributed to the use of sovereignty in recent years. The party's birth within the Regional Council contributed to the formation of a political approach that saw the insertion of the Sardinian nationalist forces within state institutions as crucial in the development of independentist politics as serious political contenders (Pala 2016: 259). Sovereignty was primarily considered in terms of 'fiscal sovereignty' (Pala 2016: 260) and in July 2015 the party formed the group “Soberanìa e Indipendentzia” in the Regional Council along with the RM (Pala 2016: 262).

One interviewee and previous member of the RM, Roberto, confirmed this, referring to sovranismo as: ‘a word that had perhaps been invented, […] by the RM, with the aim of pursuing independence without rejecting agreements with national parties and using the current possibilities we have more effectively’. Roberto further explained:

> ‘We had said it ‘soberanìa est indipendentzia’ [sovereignty is independence] […] it is also beautiful to hear and means that if we manage to use the instruments that we already have at our disposal well, we can obtain a large part of the independence that we would have if we’d broken connection with the state. It’s a shame that even in the party of which I was a member, the attention placed on the gradual acquisition of progressively larger spaces of sovereignty was too small’.

Whilst he seemed to suggest that the party later abandoned this notion of sovranismo due to its association with the right-wing politics of the Lega, this conception of sovereignty as gradual process of manoeuvre nevertheless seemed common amongst a number of activists from different parties and groups.

5.5 Sovereignty as Political Spin

Asking activists to define sovereignty was not a straightforward process. Quite a few people were ambivalent towards the term due to its very ambiguity and its use by particular factions of the independentist movement in particular ways such as those seen above. Respondents’ mixed feelings often stemmed from concerns related to conceptual choice. Whilst it was frequently used in political documents[73], speeches and so forth, its function as a delineator of political objectives was not altogether obvious to a number of activists. Many felt independence and self-determination were more applicable when speaking of *Sardinian* politics and the *Sardinian* national question, and it became apparent that sovereignty was not expressed and received uniformly amongst activists. Selection of what word to use was something that emerged early on in my discussions, with some treating sovereignty as synonymous with ‘autodeterminazione’, ‘indipendenza’ and ‘autogoverno’, meaning self-determination, independence and self-government. One respondent viewed sovereignty as obsolete: ‘for me sovereignty is only a synonym, rather a reductive word for independence’ (Sergio). In some cases, it went beyond a question of semantic content, with some openly expressing their reservations with sovereignty’s ambiguity preferring to use other words. When asked ‘how do you define sovereignty?’ one activist followed up with the question of ‘cioè’, translating to ‘i.e.?’ He proceeded to tell me that he never used it (Igor). After thinking about how he defined and differentiated between sovereignty, independence, self-determination, autonomy, Roberto too observed that:

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[73] Examples include art. 1 of the PSd’Az party statute (n.d.): ‘il Partidu Sardu – Partito Sardo d’Azione è la libera associazione di coloro che si propongono, attraverso l’azione politica, di affermare la sovranità del Popolo sardo sul proprio territorio, e di condurre la Nazione Sarda all’indipendenza’; Political Manifesto of (ProgRES n.d.b): ‘Retenimus chi s’idetidade nostra de sardos istet in dae nantis de nois, istet in s’imazinatzione, in su progetu, in su caminu de soberania chi, comente pòpulu, amus a esser bonos a fraigare totus in pari e chi, comente partidu, amus a esser bonos a propònnere a sa sotziedade sarda e a sas fortzas bivas, dinàmicas, progressivas e democràticas a beru, chi si movent in intro de issa. S’identidade nostra istat in sa connoschèntzia, in sa passione, in s’impignu cuncretu, fitianu e cumpartzidu chi cada sardu chi punnat a sa soberania natzionale prena e cumprida at a resessire a bogare a campu.’; (Maninchedda & Sedda n.d.: 2): ‘Ci serve un governo sardo e dei sardi che metta in campo soluzioni vere, oneste, coraggiose, efficaci che facciano fare un nuovo passo nella direzione della sovranità, della coscienza nazionale, dell’autodeterminazione del popolo sardo.’

> ‘It is difficult to pick a word because every one of the words you have mentioned, self-determination, autonomy, independence, and federalism can be linked, shall we say to concrete developments in political activity in the past few years and everyone seems to point to a direction that defines the movements of parties, historical moments, not only the literal meaning of the word it expresses’.

Indeed, sovereignty’s insertion within the Sardinian context meant the term had very specific connotations beyond its links to juridical, international norms of statehood. Its use in more strategic ways as seen previously was criticized on a number of occasions on the grounds that it represented an attempt by certain groups within the movement to rebrand the independence cause in favour of ‘softer’ approaches and rhetoric. This critical view of sovranismo in particular tended to be put forward by those on the Left of the movement, however, there were a number of activists on the right who raised similar concerns. There was a strong sense that those using sovereignty as opposed to independence or self-determination were doing it in order to co-opt the independence cause in order to further political interests that ran contrary to independence and self-determination. Even Lorenzo as we saw previously, favoured a legalistic, conventional reading pointed to sovranismo’s recent appearance: ‘if you remove the last period, sovereignty as such, doesn’t exist amongst currents of thought’; suggesting this was a deliberate move by some to take control of the independentist narrative.[74]

Some activists suggested that the use of sovereignty would have political ramifications that would impact their credibility within the movement. When asked how he felt about the concept, Davide, organizing member of the PA coalition and popular commentator, said he thought it was a ‘nice’ term but one that had many connotations which he did not like such as its links to the PdS which had been heavily criticized for its entering into coalition with the centre-left Italian PD. For Davide it was an 'absurdity' to think that they cared about sovereignty and as a result the coalition chose not use the term.

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[74] This is an interesting comment given the eventual alliance that the PSd’Az would enter with the Lega which are widely regarded as key proponents of right-wing discourses of ‘sovranismo’.

Some activists who voiced their rejection or ambivalence to sovereignty saw it as not only an expression of clientelist politics within the independence movement, but as a result also saw it as being symptomatic of the historic failures of the Sardinian autonomist movement which had never adequately advocated for Sardinia's economic, political and cultural interests due to its links with the Italian political class. Angelo, active figure in the Left of the movement, claimed:

> 'There are Sardinian parties that do not use the term independence because they work with Italian parties. It's like going to a murder and thinking it's possible to create peace. I think that there isn't a middle ground. We need to destroy this idea and not join with centralist parties. We need to break our relationship with Italy. Autonomism doesn't mean anything. We're autonomist now but that hasn't changed things.'

In a similar vein, Sergio, explained:

> 'You need to know that in Sardinia there has been, around years of 2010, a movement that was a 'movimento sovranista' in which there was a union between different types of struggles in particular those that fought above all for energetic sovereignty, monetary sovereignty and food sovereignty in Sardinia and which threw this term sovereignty around. This was for me, like a game in order to not use the word independence. Also because the term independence scares so many people.'

We find reference here to what might be interpreted as a graduated notion of sovereignty. Sergio seemed to critique this approach on the grounds that it represented an attempt to play with independentist discourse in a way that would avoid conjuring the negative connotations the concept of independence might have more widely. When tied to the particular actions of parties such as the PdS or the RM who entered into coalitions with unionist parties, this play was presented as a corrupt approach that did not offer the radical coherent alternative many felt was needed in the movement but which simply absorbed the independence cause within existing political relations.

Critique of the particular term sovranismo was becoming even more pronounced whilst in the field due to its association to the far-right party the Lega and Salvini (Agnew 2019; Becchi 2018; De Luca 2019) which would enter into coalition with the PSd'Az at the 2018 general elections. Many activists were explicit in their opposition to the Lega's politics. Activist and well-known commentator Andrea Pili summed this sentiment up (2018), rejecting the Lega's anti-European sovranismo as based on the myth that exit from the EU would allow states to address the economic inequalities that emerged following adoption of the euro. This approach 'impedes seeing how such monetary devaluations […] have functioned as clientelist means for the conservation of power'. Moreover, it omits 'the development difference between North and Southern peripheries and island, a constant in the history of the unitary state' (own translation).

What we find in many of these critical accounts, is a portrayal of sovereignty as something that is manipulated in accordance with particular interests. There was the sense in some of these accounts that sovereignty had a particular definition that was being *corrupted* for political gain by actors who were not interested in the creation of genuine transformative politics. Moreover, the stasis that was attributed to the term by those critical of its use stemmed from a normative approach that saw it represent an ethical ideal but which ultimately was not possible to achieve by virtue of its use in given circumstances and of who was using it. There was an awareness of the antagonist implications of the very process of signification and selection, a sense that the use of sovereignty represented some sort of deliberate choice and a shared concern with the implications of these word choices. This sentiment was summed up by Igor who after discussing the difficulties surrounding choosing the terms they used explained: 'in reality everyone uses the language they want in order to justify their choices'. The concepts activists used represented particular ways of engaging with the independence question and other interrelated forces such as Italian parties and an international context of economic exchange.

5.6 Sovereignty as *Doing*

The responses here outlined provide a snapshot of some of the ways Sardinian independentists defined sovereignty in the field. They show that whilst respondents frequently drew attention to conventional readings and desires for a bordered Sardinian national unity, most interviewees nevertheless problematized absolutist visions of sovereignty tied exclusively to the workings of states. We saw this amongst those who emphasized sovereignty's reliance on its external recognition. Although there was an ascription of the capacity for internal state decision-making and authority to sovereignty in these accounts, there was a significant preoccupation with the structural consequences of Sardinia's insertion within an international context of political action and recognition. Echoing Walker's distinction between 'graduated' as opposed to 'binary' conceptualizations of the term, sovereignty was here seen as enhanced and limited by conditions of interdependence (Walker 2018: 9). It was not a zero-sum condition but something that could be extended, minimized or pooled through varying levels of recognition and legitimation and something that could be continuously constructed.

A second way in which activists interrogated conventional framings was through an approach that considered it a useful strategy for the gradual conquest of political power within different areas of governance. In both framings, what we find is an understanding of sovereignty as not only symbolic of particular conditions of mobilization but as denoting a particular form of political activity through which Sardinians can open up spaces for mobilization and control. Whilst in the case of those who described it as a gradual process, we find a similar concern with utilizing the state as the main means through which independence and self-determination might be established, there was a greater focus on the idea of sovereignty as a particular praxis; a way of approaching and furthering the independence cause in a social context that presented particular hurdles for what 'practicable' contestation could be.

Finally, the last approach here considered, namely, the view that sovereignty represented a false independentism, the term was symbolic of an approach that would not or could not deliver genuine avenues for change necessary to transform Sardinia. It was defined on the basis of who was using it and tied to the elitist, racialized imaginaries of national identity and action that they were specifically seeking emancipation from. Sovereignty referred to a particular political approach, reflective of attempts by activists to reject or maintain existing conditions and the primacy of Italian and regional political elites.

A quick overview of these approaches to sovereignty is useful for the study at hand, highlighting a number of notable features of activists' conceptualizations of sovereignty as well as some important methodological and theoretical considerations for how we might study sovereignty claims more generally. Indeed, there were some striking overlaps between how activists interpreted and discussed sovereignty and the theoretical contributions made by critical IR scholars considered in Chapter 2. Activists demonstrated an appreciation of the political nature of meaning making, rejected and problematized sovereignty as a binary notion, and explicitly engaged with the dialectical nature of signification. For activists, sovereignty's use and definition constituted a means through which they promoted or rejected particular approaches to Sardinian nationalism and the pursuit of 'independence', 'self-determination', 'statehood', and so forth. When respondents explicitly discussed the process of defining sovereignty their accounts often aligned with the idea particularly emphasized in post-structuralist scholarship, namely, that signification, the meanings we attach to the language we use are intricately embroiled in the constitution of political struggle.

The performative aspect of sovereignty claims was made particularly visible in the ways in which the term served to delineate horizons for possible manoeuvre as well as in the often-explicit acknowledgement of the issue of selection and the implications their choice and use of terms such as sovereignty had for the development of the movement more generally. Mirroring the arguments made by critical IR scholars around sovereignty's discursive manifestation, sovereignty represented a way of doing politics. Moreover, activists seemed acutely aware of the extent to which the selection of the terms they used as well as the ways in which they defined them, carried important *political* implications. Their descriptions pointed to what Ernesto Laclau has described as the 'partiality' of signification, namely, acts of investment in particular framings (Laclau 2007: 116). It was clear that for many, how we interpret and articulate concepts such as sovereignty was of crucial importance within the broader scope of political contestation inside and outside the movement. Sovereignty represented a means through which activists distinguished themselves from others and pursued diverging and often converging approaches to the issue of Sardinian national self-determination.

Lorenzo who initially framed sovereignty in conventional terms explained that:

> 'language is everything. We express ourselves in this chat speaking. We understand each other with language. We remember with words. Language like the word 'logos', Greek, is what created the world, in a beginning it was the verb. Language is especially identity […] In language we find a synthesis of history, culture and traditions of a people. We also find synthesis in the capacity to recognize each other in the world. We recognize each other when we speak because we're Sardinian and if one recognizes oneself and knows what the parameters are which differentiates them from whoever they have before them and can thus confront them. From discussion everything is born'.

His description of language indicated an approach towards signification that regarded it as foundational to how we relate to one another and the world around us. The use of logos here is striking, emphasizing language's role in the constitution of the world and reflecting an appreciation of the significance of past forms of thinking and speaking in the formulation of present-day conditions. Moreover, his description was reflective of the ways in which activists frequently framed the issue of discursive selection as politically fraught, a means through which they waged their claims and struggles with others in the movement and beyond. Activists, like Lorenzo, saw themselves as not only recipients of inherited discourses of sovereignty but as active forces in their construction.

Another notable overlap with some of the critical discussions examined in Chapter 2, was the frequent obfuscation of a clear-cut binary interpretation of sovereignty where the concept reflected a rigid state-centric conceptualization of sovereign power. Whilst there were some who certainly subscribed to this view, they were in a minority. The majority of respondents framed sovereignty in often contrasting terms, describing it in varying ways and acknowledging different interpretations, evincing what post-structuralist theorists have described as an and/or logic of signification where 'a person or a thing is constituted by and simultaneously embodies multiple, seemingly contradictory meanings that may confuse and confound a simple either/or dichotomy' (Weber 2016: 40). This idea developed particularly by Cynthia Weber to consider the much-overlooked significance of queer subjectivities that find meaning and 'power' through 'plural logoi' that cannot be captured when deconstructed through a lens that opposes meaning to a 'singular logos'[75] (2016), the definition here of the and/or captures a striking feature of the ways in which sovereignty was interpreted by activists that evades realist formulations of sovereign power.

Activist definitions and uses of the term often reflected a reluctance to essentialize sovereignty into one thing or another. Even if respondents initially framed sovereignty in conventional terms, they themselves rarely subscribed to such neat distinctions, often viewing sovereignty as a political and normative ideal, and/or a political tool, and/or a way of reformulating independentism, and/or a way of appealing to wider political and economic structures. Indeed, we saw this particularly amongst those critical of sovereignty's use, many of whom still regarded sovereignty as an important term and were often acutely aware of the problem with defining sovereignty. The latter referred to both territorial self-determination and/or political spin, and/or political expansion, depending on the circumstances in which it was understood. Activists attached a plurality to signification as a means through which they could delineate antagonistic lines between same and other as well as adopt framings that did not solely define sovereignty within the category of state.

As we have seen, such plurality in sovereignty's signification has often remained unaccounted for in realist definitions as well as some critical literatures such as historical materialist IR scholarship which has primarily restricted sovereignty to an expression of the abstraction of private property relations within the state (see section 2.4). Sovereignty, in this literature tends to be treated as simple abstraction and 'nothing but the objectified mind of the subjects of the state' (Marx as quoted in Bieler & Morton 2008: 117). What activist approaches here examined indicate, however, is that sovereignty is far more complex and up for reinterpretation than ordinarily admitted in these debates, stressing the need for the development of approaches to sovereignty that enable an engagement with the term's malleability and continuous construction as a manifestation of political doing.

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[75] The notion of logos, borrowed from Jacques Derrida, refers to when 'a singular, specific word signifying a specific presence—grounds all meaning in a linguistic system because of how it is positioned as a universal referent that is located outside of history' (Weber 2016: 34-35). Ashley argues that sovereign man has played the role of a logos in realist theories of IR (Weber 2016: 35).

This is not to say that there were not some important overlaps between activist conceptualisations of sovereignty and historical materialist approaches to discursive formulation. Indeed, there was more at play in activist treatments of sovereignty than simply an appreciation and engagement with the non-fixity of sovereignty's signification. Equally important was the pervasive sense that the language and symbolic framings they used were necessarily interlinked with a wider cultural fabric and 'constellation of forces' (Hall 1986b: 42) that constrained what they felt sovereignty could entail. What we find is a very Gramscian understanding of the role of language and its relationship to the world. Sovereignty's signification was embroiled in questions surrounding the historicism of ideas as malleable and reproduced by activists, whilst also tied to common-sense understandings rooted in a complex array of social relations. In Lorenzo's description of language above for example, he characterizes it as a synthesis of history, culture, tradition, recognition and the means through which we relate to each other, echoing both Gramsci and Hall's reminders that 'no social practice [...] floats free of the determinate effects of the concrete relations in which they are located' and by extension the cultural framings through which we interpret the world (Hall 1996 in Bruff 2008: 52).

The issue of circumstance and the particularity of conditions was a highly significant factor in activist accounts and their favouring of non-absolutist definitions of sovereignty. The strategic readings encountered in the field as well as sovereignty's problematization *and* continued use indicated the importance placed on there being a correspondence between the language and ideas they used and the wider cultural and social relations within which they were situated. Sovereignty's signification was not completely fluid but rather tied to very specific concerns and visions of the political conditions shaping what sovereignty entailed. There was a 'directedness' (Bruff 2009: 59) in activist claims, intimating different interests, forces and positions within the Sardinian struggle. Activists related the term to the world around them and their political aims and they rejected or accepted it based on what sovereignty did and *could* mean. Differences in position and crucially, the favouring of an and/or logic of signification were often justified on the basis of contextual factors such as *who* was using sovereignty and *how* sovereignty related to existing conditions of state and interstate recognition and participation. Moreover, the problematization of conventional framings even by those who favoured such readings was done on the grounds that such forms of sovereignty could not materialize given existing political and economic infrastructures and relations of possibility.

Concerns with conditions of manoeuvre in many ways reflected minority nationalists' positionality within existing social configurations and the extent to which their claims specifically questioned the cohesion and givenness of the state form as well as the unevenness of conditions within existing political infrastructures. Sovereignty indicated desires for control, self-determination, the creation of a unified Sardinian will, suggesting the lack thereof, and described limited openings for mobilization, the restrictive effects of intra-state relations and the structuring power of an already-existing global and international context of political and economic action. It also pointed to differing ways in which they understood the kinds of approaches they could adopt between gradualist and transformative strategies that could create new spaces for Sardinian self-determination which reflected not only the structuring influence of inherited notions of legitimacy and possibility but also of a series of antagonistic relations activists were engaged in. In short, sovereignty was dialectically constructed.

An initial examination of activist accounts thus points to a number of important observations; namely, the need to adopt an approach that makes serious allowances for 1) ideological and discursive construction as an always ongoing process and political praxis, as well as 2) the situated and relational nature of signification and the constitutive role played by this embeddedness in its articulation. Crucially, it brings into stark relief the contribution a Gramscian perspective can make to the analysis of sovereignty's continued significance. On the one hand, the dialectical nature of sovereignty's definition has more often than not been underappreciated in IR scholarship by post-structuralist readings which have been at the forefront of attempts to deconstruct sovereignty. As Bieler and Morton note, whilst these approaches have been particularly effective at drawing attention to what has been 'taken as given' within the discipline such as state sovereignty, their emphasis on contingency and the impossibility of 'ontological fullness' and thus knowing with any certainty what these discourses tell us about the 'material and ideational basis of world order', undermines the role and significance of relations of power, class and capital in the reproduction and persistence of certain common sense understandings of the world (Bieler and Morton 2008: 110). As such they are often unable to provide a possible explanation for the 'structural power' and 'agency' of particular social forces and 'relations of force' and why certain discourses are favoured over others (Bieler & Morton 2008: 112), thereby rendering 'exploitation and domination into a shapeless and contingent world of 'fetishized self/other differences' (Bieler & Morton 2008: 114).

Conversely, for existing neo-Gramscian IR scholarship which has primarily focused on broader questions around state formation and the interconnections between national, international and transnational social relations of production (e.g. Bieler & Morton 2001a; Cox 1987; Gill 1990; Pijl 1998), there is similarly much to be gained from devoting greater attention to discursive articulation and the ways in which the problematization of sovereignty reflects complex attempts to mobilize and contest. More needs to be done to consider the political doing that is the stabilization and destabilization of the concepts people use, and to provide a means through which we can more actively engage with the very Gramscian assertion that ‘it is on the level of ideologies that men become conscious of conflicts in the world of the economy’ (Gramsci 1971 as quoted in Bieler & Morton 2008: 120) and that reality that ‘political struggle centres on the basis of how humans […] think and act’ (Bruff 2008: 47).

The adoption of a more ‘sociologically’ informed Gramscian perspective can help us respond on both counts, engaging as it does with the study of discourse as a critical site of struggle as well as giving weight to the significance of the ‘organic historical effectivity’ of ideas and language (Hall 1986a: 20). Its privileging of language and ideas as fundamental to the manifestation of political struggle as well as the concrete specificities and ‘determinancy’ of the social conditions which contour the ‘symbolic framings’ through which we make sense of the world (Hall 1986b: 42) facilitate an approach that helps avoid some of the limits of the critical accounts examined in Chapter 2. Holding fast to the idea that ‘you can’t get out of the reproduction of material life – but also, you can never get outside the reproduction of symbolic life’ (Hall 1997: 30), there is a persistent emphasis on the ‘concrete analysis of how, in particular historical situations, ideas “organise human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.”’ (Gramsci 1971 as quoted in Hall 1986b: 40). Such a perspective enables us to ‘[recognize] the “plurality” of selves or identities of which the so-called “subject” of thought and ideas is composed’, whilst not losing sight that this plurality is not only a reflection of the impossible closure of signification but the latter’s necessary relation to a wider context of social relations and political struggle as a ‘collective phenomenon’ (Gramsci 1986a: 22).

With these initial conclusions in mind, the following chapters continue to unpack activist sovereignty claims, placing particular focus on the sense of situatedness that informed their approaches to the term. Chapter 6 considers how activists understood existing conditions of manoeuvre and highlights the importance they attached to material conditions and social relations of production shaping political mobilization through an analysis of their preoccupation with the establishment of ‘credible’ mobilization. As we shall see, activists were deeply concerned with the legacies of passive revolution and uneven development considered in Chapter 4 which filtered into their conceptualizations and uses of sovereignty, shaping their interpretations of the horizons for possible independentist manoeuvre and go some way towards explaining some of the peculiarities of their problematizations of sovereignty seen here. What the remaining chapters show is the importance of the wider tapestry of social relations of production and economic, political and cultural forces within the state and beyond for our appreciation of the full scope of nuances attached to sovereignty signification, and the need to adopt a dialectical approach to the term’s analysis. They warn us of the potentially reductive implications of the study of concepts such as sovereignty that does not place sufficient importance on the constraining effects of concrete social relations, and which fail to give enough weight to the political significance and messiness of the discursive contestation which have much to tell us much about the topography of such relations.

Chapter 6: A Credible Sovereign:

> ‘We didn’t have the information but above all we didn’t have the cultural hegemony in a Gramscian sense’ (Igor).
>
> ‘With the Italian economic boom, with the boom which we could smell here in Sardinia and the arrival of factories, the arrival of modernity which was only exploitation and colonialism, people aligned culture and progress with Italy and poverty and backwardness with Sardinia’ (Riccardo).

6.1 Introduction

The last chapter provided an overview of the different ways in which activists interpreted sovereignty, drawing particular attention to the extent to which they problematized realist formulations and regarded sovereignty not as a static form of territorial power but as a way of *doing* politics. Usage of the term not only highlighted activists’ awareness of the significance of discursive selection but also pointed to the relational nature of their claims to sovereignty. The latter’s varying significance rested on the ways in which activists related it to particular strategic concerns, interests and forces.

This chapter unpacks this relational dimension of activists’ claims further through an examination of the ways in which they understood the conditions shaping mobilization and the pursuit of sovereignty. The central aim is to draw attention to how activists ‘historicized’ their own demands, i.e. considered the ‘worldliness’ of their aims and political objectives and the social conditions within which they made them (Morton 2003a). An appreciation of activists’ understanding of what Gill describes as the ‘limits of the possible’ (Gill 2008: 13), the horizons and conditions of possible manoeuvre and transformation, is crucial in adequately capturing the significance they attached to sovereignty within their broader visions of Sardinian independence. It allows us to sketch the contours of the struggles that activists regularly engaged in, as well as the social relations of production informing activist approaches to the national question.

With these aims in mind, the chapter focuses on respondents’ frequent concern with the attainment of ‘credibility’. As we shall see, the issue often came up in interviews and more informal exchanges, alluding to a range of perceived hurdles impeding political manoeuvre such as public scepticism, the economic viability of secession, maintenance of ideological coherence, international recognition, amongst others. They frequently expressed preoccupation with the appeal to an existing political system and with what sovereignty *could* mean given various constraints and possibilities. The chapter shows that activists’ desires for credibility indicated a widespread convergence on the ‘situatedness’ of their demands for sovereignty, on the sense of being ‘caught between systems’ and of the need to create political strategies that favoured what I refer to as a politics of *situated rupture* that facilitated recognition and mobilization within existing social conditions.

Crucially, what their accounts show is that activists attached significance to a range of issues that were not only national in scope but intricately tied to a wider 'transnational' context of political and economic relations shaping what activists felt they could do and claim. Whilst differences emerged on the kinds of approaches they felt they needed to adopt in order to acquire credibility, more frequently than not, activists recognized the structuring effects of dynamics of revolution/restoration and uneven development in the materialization of the Sardinian nationalist cause and its continuation. Contention emerged between those calling for an approach to political mobilization that appealed to a European or international context of recognition and economic exchange, those calling for moderate strategies that functioned within the contours of politics as they are and those concerned with creating more radical ruptures with the current order of things. Where they converged was in a recognition of the rootedness of their experiences and demands for self-determination, independence, sovereignty, that alluded to persistent issues of economic exploitation and cultural marginalization within and outside the Italian state. Most attributed the latter to a long history of 'colonial' struggle, suggesting that the movement was a response to the legacies of Italian unification and a continued failure to recognize Sardinia's historic and cultural peculiarities and to address a range of factors historically contributing to the 'peripherization' of Sardinia: poverty, clientelism, poor investment, resource extraction, amongst others. The struggle, however, was not only framed as being between Sardinians and a regional or Italian elite, but was framed around the manifestation of capitalist interests within and beyond the Sardinian context and fractures prevalent across an international system within which they felt necessarily bound but also excluded.

The chapter proceeds with a brief outline of discussions around the issue of credibility in minority nationalism literature that helps us appreciate the significance the attainment of credibility has for many of these actors in Europe. Crucially, it draws attention to the 'peripheral' status of minority nationalists and the extent to which they are often confined to act within the limited openings afforded within the states in which they find themselves as well as transnational forces and conditions influencing manoeuvre. Focus moves onto a closer examination of activist discussions about credibility encountered in the field. Here we will consider the widespread feeling amongst activists of being 'caught between systems' and the need to create political alternatives capable of addressing the structural conditions that have shaped Sardinia's status within Italy and beyond. Activists' interpretations of the challenges facing independentist mobilization shows us that they regarded Sardinia's national marginalization as intimately tied to the Italian state's maintenance of economic inequalities through historic transformist practices such as clientelism. Moreover, their calls for the adoption of political approaches that both worked in accordance with existing state and international political and economic infrastructures whilst simultaneously rejecting them, indicated a movement torn between a desire to transform and reform existing conditions.

6.2 European Minority Nationalisms, Historical Blocs and Credibility

The issue of credibility crops up frequently in scholarship examining minority nationalisms in Europe, reflective of the subaltern position many of these movements often occupy within established state and EU infrastructures. Whilst the term credibility itself has received little scrutiny, analyses that have pointed to its significance have drawn attention to the term's delineation of a series of institutional, political and economic hurdles facing minority nationalists in Europe such as pervasive public scepticism, ideological coherence, government inexperience, economic competitiveness, international integration, to name a few (see Bourne 2014: 111; Csergo & Goldgeier 2004: 26; De Winter & Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 485; Hepburn 2008: 547; 2009a: 488; Jackson-Preece 1997: 345; Muro, Vidal, & Vlaskamp 2020: 178, 179, 180, 181).

Attempts to specifically unpack the significance of credibility for minority nationalisms have tended to consider it an issue of public perception, indicating concerns with the popular acceptance, trust and belief in the commitment and capacity of regionalist/nationalist parties to deliver on their objectives of independence or increased regional devolution. A notable example can be found in Anwen Elias' (2015) comparative analysis of the Catalan parties Convergència i Unió (CiU) and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), which indicates the substantial importance of ideological coherence and belief in party commitment on public attitudes towards the parties in question. Elias' examination of electoral behaviour suggests that minority nationalists' wavering support for independence as well as their commitment to Left or Right political approaches negatively impact their chances and standing as credible contenders amongst voting populations. Similarly, Sonia Alonso's work (2012) which addresses the issue of credibility in European minority nationalist mobilization also ties it to questions of public perception and electoral competition. She defines credibility as a product of a combination of 'responsibility' and 'reliability' (Alonso 2012: 41) with responsibility referring to the temporal alignment of 'projected' aims and 'past actions' and reliability to an 'adequate prediction' of ‘future actions’ (Alonso 2012: 41). We find a comparable insistence on ideological coherence and long-term commitment as key determining features of popular perceptions of credibility.

The issue of ‘credibility’ also emerges as an important consideration in literature that has examined the economic and international strategies favoured by minority nationalists in Europe. What we find in this literature is a much more extensive network of overlapping interests that contribute to minority nationalist perceptions and attainment of credibility and which emphasize the mutually defining relationship between claims and conditions for national self-determination and a wider context of economic and political integration within Europe. Inclusion within the dominant political economy of the EU, for example, has been described as an important means through which such groups seek to acquire ‘credibility’ (Bourne 2014; Csergo & Goldgeier 2004: 26; De Winter & Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 485) as a potential platform for the ‘maximization of sovereignty’ (Laible 2008) and the expression of claims that go beyond the territorial or national question (De Winter & Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 485). The EU is or has been seen by nationalists as offering a way of ‘pooling’ sovereignty in a context of neoliberal governance by increasing access to what Keating describes as ‘meso-levels’ of mobilization through the use of EU regional policy funds for instance (Keating 2008 and 2014b) that can insert them within extensive and established networks of investment that go above and beyond the state (Hassan 2009: 12) and facilitate sub-national cooperation. Citing Lynch, Jolly similarly states (2007: 111):

> ‘In the past, ‘[t]he types of arguments used against minority nationalist and regionalist demands have often centred around the impracticalities of upsetting administrative and political traditions constructed around central institutions’ (Lynch, 1996: 12). Thus, for regional political entrepreneurs, European integration increases the credibility of demands for greater autonomy, ranging from independence to devolution to cultural rights, and therefore their parties’ credibility. In return, this factor provides incentives for regionalist political parties to be pro-European Union or Europhiles’.

The literature shows that the effects of this economic and international scope of credibility has contributed to the gradual favouring of ‘instrumental’ arguments for self-determination ‘in terms of competitiveness, well-being, delivery of social services, good governance and democracy’ (Dalle Mulle 2016: 224). Moreover, the turn to the EU has also been regarded by some as a way of increasing ideological credibility as movements opposed to culturally exclusive discourses of national self-determination (Curtice 2016; Keating 2009; Hepburn 2006; 2009a; 2010; Mau 2005) and attuned to conditions of increased globalization (Hepburn 2008: 547; 550; Holitscher & Suter 1999).

Whilst it lies beyond the scope of the present study to unpack the implications of these accounts in extensive depth, what they do serve to draw attention to is the range of challenges European minority nationalists often have to navigate in order to attain political primacy. The concern with credibility points to the limiting effects of state infrastructures and a European or 'global' context of political and economic exchange on manoeuvre, alluding to what in Gramscian terms can be described as historical blocs shaping demands. Governments, parties, electorates, relations of production, combine to form a 'constellation' of 'complex' 'ensembles' of relations and forces (Gramsci 1971: 365) held together by 'intellectual and moral' (Morton 2007a: 118) 'congruencies' between 'material forces [and] institutions' (Gill & Law 1993: 94). The issue of public perception and electoral support, for example, signals the influence of state representation and participation on the ability of minority nationalist actors to acquire visibility and ethico-political influence, in addition to the establishment of hegemonic notions of what credible and legitimate political practice entails.

Crucially, what these discussions of credibility also highlight is the often-peripheral position minority nationalists occupy within a context of political and economic practice (Keating & McGarry 2001: 8) that is not confined to the workings of individual states but which reflects a global configuration of power intimately tied to the manifestation of capitalist exchange and class networks that lie within *and* beyond the state. The discussions of the significance of European integration, for instance, alludes to the existence of what neo-Gramscian scholarship has defined as a 'transnational' bloc of social relations that has accompanied the formation of bodies such as the EU which traverses states, influencing both 'material' *and* 'normative structures' through for example, the adoption of neoliberal policies and the pursuit of greater integration across member states (Gill & Law 1993: 97). In short, the issue of credibility emphasizes the situatedness of minority nationalisms within an amalgamation of political and economic configurations of power that are not exclusively national or international in kind but which reflect the complex, uneven and often messy convergences and legacies of political struggle, state-building and capitalist development.

In Sardinia, as we shall see, activists' discussions of credibility alluded to similar challenges - public perception, electoral competition, economic and international appeal, and ideological coherence – and evinced an appreciation of a dialectical correspondence between national self-determination as well as Sardinia's situation within a wider transnational or global context of economic and political exchange. This awareness manifested not only in discussions about political strategy and what they felt they could feasibly do, but also in their depictions of existing conditions that reflected the ongoing legacies of the failures of the Italian national project and the continuum of class antagonisms that were not solely based in Sardinia or Italy but tied to the machinations of a wider context of political and economic activity within which they were necessarily bound.

6.3 Credible Independentism and the Politics of Situated Rupture

At a public seminar organized by the regional EU branch SardegnaEuropa in conjunction with the European centre-left coalition of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), a panel of eight were invited to give their thoughts on the central theme of the night: ‘The Sardinian Question: Independence, Autonomy, Europe of the Peoples’[76]. One of a series of highly publicized talks arranged with the aim of promoting public discussions on Sardinian development, the event’s focus was on the lingering Sardinian question and the challenges a response to it might face in a world of supranational governance and global exchange. The panel was divided between the organizers who viewed independence with suspicion as an ‘unrealistic’ response to contemporary pressures; representatives of the independence movement who rejected centralized Italian state politics as corrupt and unable to address institutional failures contributing to the ‘Sardinian’ question; and ‘autonomists’ who situated themselves somewhere in between.

The event was held at the 4-star Regina Margherita hotel in central Cagliari, not far from the city’s main touristic stretch, harbour and regional assemblies. It was well attended, quickly filling up with members of the public and presumed panel acquaintances, friends, families and colleagues. Guests were greeted with canapes and drinks. Cameras dotted the room. It was the most formal affair I had attended up to that point, a reminder of the significant wealth disparities between the large Italian parties such as the PD and the more modest resources of the significantly smaller independentist groups I came to engage with. Leading the discussion were university professor Guido Melis and former Regional President, MEP and billionaire, Renato Soru, both of whom had been prominent figures within the centre-left Democratic Party (PD); the ex-president of the autonomous region of Trentino Alto-Adige Lorenzo Dellai, the secretary of the PSd’Az and now regional president Christian Solinas; and PA spokesperson and former editor of the regional paper l’Unione Sarda, Anthony Muroni.

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[76] You can access filmed footage of panellist interventions at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCw8vvKiKpq353mpfMyzT3wg/videos

The debate centred on independentism's capacity to produce 'credible' programmes of action that could address Sardinia's development. Reflecting both SardegnaEuropa and the PD's pro-EU stance, those who were sceptical of independentism argued that Sardinia's future depended on its embracing Europe and a European identity within Italy. The island's capacity to engage with Europe would be decisive in its possible insertion within an international context of development that could rectify its structural problems. They also outlined constitutional and legal challenges facing the instatement of greater autonomy and stressed Sardinia's potential for increased interconnectivity on an international scale. 'Sardinian' independence was not an appropriate response to today's globalized forms of power and governance that had diminished the relevance of ideals such as state sovereignty. Sardinians needed to be pragmatic, realistic in the face of such pressures and thus cognisant of their place within a global context of market exchange. Historian Luciano Marrocu lamented independentists' reliance on emotive responses, on 'anti-democratic' notions of identity, and on the lack of clarity of their aims, complaining that he did not fully understand what 'sovranismo' even meant. Whilst, Soru, who became particularly animated, argued that the kind of independence that really mattered was 'individual independence, mental independence, economic independence'. What Sardinians needed was innovation, modernity, the capacity to create the *new*.

Amongst the invited 'independentist' speakers, the European Union was regarded more negatively. Focus was instead placed on the failures of the Italian central government which had contributed to Sardinia's problems. Muroni rejected the idea that he was some extremist independentist. This, he asserted, was the image Soru had invited him to represent. For him many of Sardinia's problems were the result of the ruling class' 'tight control' of voting in the region, of clientelism and a failure to represent the majority of Sardinians. For him the most important thing that needed to be done was to try to understand the causes behind high levels of apathy amongst people who had lost faith in the existing system in order to begin to move 'forward'. The destruction of any political 'credibility' in Sardinia came from afar, from Rome and a blocked political system where Europe and Italy made the rules. Sardist Christian Solinas noted the structural gaps in Sardinia, emphasizing the issue of poverty and the competitive disadvantages experienced by Sardinia. He called for an interrogation of globalization's limits and claimed that the Euro-sceptic movements we were seeing across Europe revealed serious flaws within the union[77] and its capacity to value human diversity. The development of a

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[77] In hindsight this intervention was an early indication of a convergence in position between Solinas' PSd'Az and the Eurosceptic right-wing Lega which would culminate in an alliance at the general election five months later.

‘credible’ alternative was tied less to an international context of exchange and more to intra-state governance and the relationships between both ‘domains’ as well as those between society and state. Lorenzo Dellai whose speech in some respects represented a halfway approach between the two sides of the debate, argued that we needed a new definition of sovereignty that could respond to both increased centralization in Italy following the 2008 financial crash. The answer lay in a federalist solution.

The exchange proved a significant moment in my fieldwork, providing not only an early indication of some of the tensions surrounding the independence movement amongst Sardinia’s political heavy-weights but also in highlighting the pervasive concern amongst activists across the spectrum with what independence, sovereignty, self-determination, and so forth *could* mean. Echoing the criticisms made by figures on the panel, this preoccupation was typically framed around the attainment and development of credibility. The latter helped express an acute awareness of the marginal position activists felt they occupied within Sardinia, drawing attention to a range of economic, social and political constraints they felt they needed to respond to such as the widespread perception that independentism was unable to live up to people’s expectations.

Indeed, there were some notable parallels between their accounts and the credibility framings considered above. Public perception, ideological consistency or coherence and the development of policies appealing to existing state structures and a global market were prized by activists, coming up frequently in interviews and discussions. Luca, who was once at the heart of the movement’s most radical factions during the 1970s, claimed in an interview that one of the major weaknesses of the movement as it stood was its failure to be regarded as ‘valid’ by both the state and Sardinians. He explained:

> ‘[the independentist movement] doesn’t operate in accordance with a programme. They don’t operate in a way that would render them valid as interlocutors […] They need to be useful and functional and be considered valid by Italy and the Sardinian population’.

In order to respond to this widespread scepticism, Luca maintained that activists needed to insert themselves within local and regional government which would give them the opportunity to prove themselves to the ‘Sardinian people’ as ‘credible’ alternatives. In the same exchange he stressed: ‘I think that the population doesn’t have enough confidence in its own political class and in itself’. The job for activists was to foster this confidence.

PA member, Davide, similarly stressed that the central obstacle facing independentism was ‘convincing ordinary people’. In a separate interview, he explained:

> ‘They are of course fearful of what may happen […] They are not going to vote for something that is fractured and divided. We need to develop a way of explaining things in a reassuring way. They need to understand that independence or greater self-determination is not a jump in the dark. But there is a great deal to do yet. It could take thirty years. We can’t force the situation but can begin to create a convincing and credible alternative’.

Credibility here hinged on public trust and the adoption of an approach that reassured people of independentism’s capacity to provide a degree of stability with what already existed. It meant utilizing state infrastructure, proving to Sardinians that they could govern, and crucially, that they could create a unifying political movement that provided a degree of continuity with the conditions shaping people’s lives. In a similar vein, Leonardo, PdS member, claimed that proponents of the national cause needed to prove their capacity to govern, to show that they could:

> ‘[manage] sovereignty and [manage] freedom and thus show that in practice we know how to build a state. That we know how to do it better than how it is done today. We know how to do it by creating opportunities, managing freedom, creating a distributed and sustainable wealth. From there we have the challenge of government. Of not making independence a purely sentimental topic, a utopian topic of hearsay […] Independence is the final festival, let’s start organizing it today, and let’s organize it well. Let’s demonstrate that if independentism goes to government […] it is more efficient than the Italian state and can respond to everyday issues.’

Like Luca and Davide, Leonardo placed a great deal of weight on demonstrating to people that independentists were capable of governing through existing institutional and political bodies. His rejection of a ‘utopian’ discourse of independence was in this respect significant, pointing to the need for ‘realistic’, ‘achievable’ and ‘credible’ approaches that could show in tangible ways the value and capabilities of independentism to the Sardinian population. Greater insertion in ‘regional and local government’ would enable them to demonstrate to Sardinians a degree of ‘ideological’ coherence as representatives of their interests.

The significance of an ‘international’ context of credibility was, as we briefly saw in the previous chapter, also evident in interviews and exchanges with activists. PSd’Az member Lorenzo who initially defined sovereignty in conventional terms, attached great importance to the issue of '*economic* credibility' and the adoption of policies that would on the one hand, avoid radically disrupting people's dependence on sources of financial stability tied to the state, and on the other, enable greater integration of a Sardinian economy within a 'global' and 'European' market. In line with criticisms made by the likes of billionaire Renato Soru at the SardegnaEuropa panel, this was central to increasing the credibility of their positions, tying it to the requirements of a globalized model of capitalist production within which Sardinia was already necessarily inserted albeit in a 'peripheral' way, opening avenues for greater investment. In addition to noting the importance of public perception, he suggested that one of the central obstacles for independence was Sardinia's geographical isolation which meant that it lacked the same advantages as other areas that were better connected through transport infrastructure and went on to emphasize the importance of providing some sort of resolution to this problem: 'We don't represent a sufficient market in a globalized economy. We therefore need a strong connection with the rest of the world.' He tied the economic argument to public trust, stating that 'independence' needs to be seen as a reassuring moment: 'to reassure the population, we need to put policies that above all enable Sardinia and Sardinian families to achieve economic independence'. Part of this reassurance lay in resolving the territorial separation that inhibited Sardinia's integration within a wider market.

Activists' calls for the development of a credible form of independentism pointed to a desire to effectively appeal to Sardinians in ways that could offer a potential means through which they could create avenues for change whilst making room for existing structural factors shaping island life. There was a widespread sense of there being an overarching hegemonic bloc of relations and forces to which Sardinians and Sardinian independentists were necessarily bound, and which translated into a dominant political system that manifested both in economic and political structures and in people's conceptions of the world. Lorenzo described this feeling in the following terms:

> 'Someone said in a very effective way that it is as if there were two political systems in Sardinia. One political system that belongs to the colonizer and made up of Italian parties rooted in Sardinia and one political system that is national, made up of Sardinian parties that continue to overlap and interlink to the point that now the clarity needed for Sardinian parties to have a majority government in the regional assembly isn't there. There is the big problem of not being able to affirm an independent path'.

The possibilities afforded to independentists were largely perceived as being limited to functioning within a social context shaped by the overlapping effects of the political primacy of forces rooted in the Italian peninsula and the struggles of a nationalist movement unable to carve its own course. It translated into a shared sense of the need to develop a politics of *situated rupture* i.e. one capable of transforming existing conditions in ways that remained cognisant of its insertion within a social context intimately tied to already existing and accepted social relations, practices, and discourses. The issue of credibility marked the horizons, or limits of what activists felt they could feasibly do which manifested in people's attitudes to political possibility as well as the material means and spaces through which political contestation could be expressed.

Crucially, the desire for the development of a credible political praxis was part of a much broader narrative that seemed pervasive amongst activists and which situated Sardinian independentism within a longer history of economic inequality and political corruption within Italy. Activists were faced with having to work around the effects of clientelism, inequality, cultural stigmatization, that substantially impeded the conditions of manoeuvre. Running throughout these accounts, however, was an appreciation of the state not as a cohesive, unitary and bounded entity but a reflection of class antagonisms and failures of a widespread system of capitalist accumulation. Sardinian independentism needed to be able to function within this context in order to gain support and mount a serious political opposition that could pursue national independence.

6.4 The Scope of the Challenge

At a quiet café in the early weeks of my fieldwork I met up with, Gabriele, an active voice in the left-wing anti-fascist factions of the movement. My Italian was still rusty and I was getting to grips with the dynamics, alliances, divisions that shaped the movement, something I felt Gabriele had noticed who subsequently and very generously attempted to break things down for me. I recall the resignation that fleeted across his face at my question: 'What do you think are the main obstacles facing the movement today?' He replied: 'In order to answer that question, we would practically finish tomorrow!'

He identified two main categories of obstacles: 'objective' and 'subjective'. The distinction between them helped him discern a range of challenges and seemed to be less an insistence on their separation and more a means of drawing attention to the complexity of the hurdles shaping mobilization, mapping out a political situation that was embedded in practices of governance and public perception. By 'subjective' obstacles Gabriele referred on a first level to independentism's poor organization which meant it was unable to develop a 'strong' 'following amongst the general public' and effectively integrate itself long-term in communities 'across the territory'. On another, it also referred to Sardinian people's dependence on the Italian state. This latter issue was intimately tied to the primary 'objective' obstacle facing independentism; namely, an Italian state apparatus that 'does everything it can to diminish independentist ideas and the concretization of independentism'. Its strength lay in its material capabilities and power over economic policy as well as policing and military which had been important 'repressive' forces that had historically inhibited separatist and Left-wing factions of the movement seen most evidently in the Arcadia operation that saw 18 activists from the Left-wing A Manca pro S'Indipendentzia (AMpsI) accused on terrorism charges. Crucially, this power infiltrated into Sardinian people's attitudes at large and was sustained by a widespread clientelist system which weakened the possibilities for the development of a transformative movement and ensured conditions of material and political dependency across Sardinian society. He explained how this system worked:

> '[Italy] has created a network of 'assistenzialismo' (welfare) which unfortunately puts brakes on the economy, impeding a real and honest process of development, a productive process. A lot of people seek to not support themselves and try to […] enter into the good graces of some politician who then sees if they can manage to put you here or there regardless of whether the sector is productive. And what does this secure? It secures the vote of the entire family of the person they have placed within the sector. Let's say it's a 'para-mafia' logic. It's a logic that in Italian legislature is called 'exchange vote' (voto di scambio), i.e. I do you a favour and you vote for me. This has built a clientele where you have politicians in Sardinia that can practically be voted in without really campaigning because they have their circle of clients formed over the years […] This paralyzes the economy. […] it creates diseconomy i.e. a parasitic economy.'

Gabriele attributed Sardinia's continued political marginalization to the prevalence of widespread corruption and a regional political elite that had largely secured its position through corrupt agreements with central government officials. Sardinian politics was dominated by state bureaucrats who relied on pay-outs and nefarious deals in order to secure jobs. It was an issue that filtered across Sardinia's population more broadly, the majority of whom was reliant on state aid and precarious or 'informal' work, resulting in a paralyzed situation of 'diseconomy' where production and transformation were limited by a reluctance to go against private agreements that promised stability and personal gain. Moreover, it was an issue that was not just national in scope but also embedded within an international system of economic investment, evident in regional government support of environmentally damaging speculation by companies such as energy providers and international organizations like the Qatar Foundation[78]. Combined with heavy policing aimed at containing independentist mobilization on the Left and widespread acquiescence across the population, the situation signalled the persistence of a bloc of forces that was not solely tied to Sardinia and Italy but to an international network of activity impeding the materialization of genuine change and whose dominance lay in a highly unequal complex of dependency.

Gabriele's breakdown raised a number of themes that would continue to come up in subsequent exchanges with activists, in particular the linkage of the Sardinian national question to the fractures caused by a 'parasitic' political class that had little regard for ordinary Sardinians. Crucially, and in line with Carlo Pala's argument that Sardinian independentism has historically been tied to economic unevenness (2016), activists' justifications for the need for Sardinian national sovereignty were inseparable from a critique of economic inequality within Sardinia and Italy more generally. Cultural stigmatization, political marginalization *and* economic exploitation were seen as being mutually reinforcing, with activist depictions of Sardinian politics echoing Gramsci's own assessments of the 'parasitic' nature of the Italian state (Gramsci 1992: 143) and the unevenness of unification particularly in Southern regions almost a century ago.

An insistence on an amalgamation of pressures affecting the movement: poor organization, lack of public engagement, opposition from central and regional government were common concerns. Activists repeatedly told me of the Italian government's utilitarian approach to the island as a source of soldiers, cheap 'manual labour' and green energy, a dumping ground for Italian waste[79], and more recently as host to some of Europe's largest military ranges Teulada, Quirra and Capo Frasca, the second of which was once regularly used by NATO. The issue of the military bases was a stark representation of the corruption amongst Sardinia's regional political class which activists regularly denounced. In a more informal discussion with a couple of members of A Foras, the primary anti-militarist group, I was told of the extensive secrecy surrounding the bases which were used by Italian military, Israeli and Turkish armed forces, NATO, and private companies, amongst others. The bases which had been established in the 1950s as part of agreements struck between the Italian state, the US and NATO during the Cold War, were being used for the experimentation of weapons. At the time of conducting field research, the regional government was including the bases in its response to the EU S3 Smart Specialization initiative aimed at the promotion of smart technologies on the grounds that they constituted optimal aero spatial infrastructures that could help advance intelligence services. According to A Foras, the bases were valued by government as a lucrative enterprise despite the evident environmental and economic devastation of the territories located within them. The lack of public opposition was a reflection of the bases' status as major employers in the poor rural areas in question as well as the secrecy that continued to shroud them. Moreover, attempts to protest against the bases were severely punished as seen in 2019 following the charging of 40 anti-militarist activists, with two on terrorism charges and attempts to establish an insurrectionist movement (La Nuova Sardegna 2019).

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[78] Qatar has recently invested millions in Sardinia, particularly in the tourist 'hot-spots' of the Costa Smeralda through organizations such as the Qatar Foundation, notably purchasing the hospital of Mater-Olbia with the aim of 'to provide advanced and excellent healthcare assistance to citizens of Sardinia, as well as to other patients coming from other nations' (Mater Olbia n.d.) as well as building projects in the hotel industry (see Costa 2019). Activists have protested against the use of millions of Regional funds towards the opening of the new hospital.

[79] The issue of waste came up regularly, particularly in relation to proposals for the instatement of nuclear waste plants which had been voted against in a referendum in 2011. Sardinia was recently named the 2nd most polluted region in Italy (Fiori 2019).

Commenting on Sardinia's extensive military bases, scholar and independentist, Domenico, explained:

> 'after the so-called Italian Unity, our Island is considered, treated and used by the Italian state like an overseas colony, an internal colony, in which they can allocate polluting industries and military bases. The military burden in Sardinia is enormous: the very President of the Region Francesco Pigliaru reiterated it, saying that 'Sardinia contributes more than 60% of the national total in terms of military presence and costs, with a population that represents only 2% of the national total.'

He went on to state:

> 'the numbers are clear. On the island over 35,000 hectares are tied to military servitude. Military servitude refers to the disposal of territory for military activity. Navigation, fishing and rest areas are prohibited in 20,000 km² of sea, an area that is almost the entire size of Sardinia. On the island there are missile ranges (Perdasdefogu), areas for firing practice (Capo Teulada), aerial ranges (Capo Frasca), military airports (Decimomannu) and fuel storages (in the heart of Cagliari) which are fed by a conduit that traverses the city. Not to mention numerous barracks and command offices/headquarters'.

The military bases' size and acceptance by regional officials who on paper criticized them, was emblematic of a widespread attitude amongst political representatives towards the misuse of Sardinian resources and lands which manifested in a reticence to oppose in any strong way the directive of government members and high-status party representatives based in the peninsula as well as international investors. The perception that the bases represented a continuation of sorts of a clientelist logic within regional political circles, was also emphasised in A Foras' Dossier on Teulada which drew attention to how the use of land for military purposes was the result of failed agrarian reforms in the 1950s, which instead of assigning fertile land to farmers in the area of Teulada, saw the municipal administrations favour 'the direction of the regional ruling classes headed by Rome' who regarded the bases an 'alternative' form of 'development' that could increase 'commercial activities' and which resulted in a gradual process of land appropriation through 'methods of dubious legality' (A Foras 2017: 7).

Others illustrated their insistence on government failure and clientelism by referring to the 'unsuccessful' Piani di Rinascita (Rebirth Plans). Vicenzo, a well-known linguist and campaigner, sarcastically denounced them, complaining:

> 'The Rebirth Plan! That extraordinary spending plan for Sardinia! […] [It] stated that it was necessary because we needed Italy's help. They have always spoken of solidarity, right? Italian solidarity. But if we look at things concretely, we find that we can only actually talk about *Sardinian* solidarity and not Italian solidarity with Sardinia […] We find that during the First World War it was 13,000 *Sardinians* who died for Italy as it benefited Italy in that war. Not 13,000 Italians who died for Sardinia because the latter needed help. In Sardinia there were only two cities that had an aqueduct and a sewerage system during WWI. And everywhere else? Everywhere else didn't even have an aqueduct or sewerage! So think about what conditions led to Italy taking 100,000 Sardinians to war […] Then you have to consider *who* benefited from this, right?'

Vicenzo criticized the idea that the Plans constituted an expression of Italian solidarity with Sardinia. Instead, they did not match the solidarity shown by Sardinians who in the wars had suffered disproportionately[80] and who at the time still had next to no access to the basic provision of water. The plans were based on the presumption that Sardinia needed state intervention when in actuality it had been the central cause of Sardinia's most desperate losses.

For trade unionist and independentist, Mario, the Rebirth Plans' failure to produce sustained results were indications of the extent to which its architects were 'fundamentally' detached from the 'realities' of the Sardinian life and working class which had century-long roots in an agro-pastoral subsistence economy. A driving factor behind the weaknesses of the local economy today, lay in the establishment of in his view, a 'model' that did not manifest in any permanent transformation of social relations on the island. In order to be able to effect any 'real' change, independence needed to bring about increased capacity to control resources and productive relations and create jobs that would be long-lasting. Instead, Sardinia, was still reeling from failed industrialization projects, the collapse of which led to significant unemployment, the disintegration of communities and pollution. In a similar vein, Giancarlo from Sardigna Natzione Indipendentzia (SNI) noted the failure to produce a genuinely integrative industrial project in Sardinia: 'Industrialization is dead [...]' he claimed, 'whereas sheep farming continues to produce'. Unlike sheep herding which was socially integral to the 'fabric' of Sardinian people's lives and established social 'codes' and collectively held practices and values, industrialization had failed to replicate such 'organic' ties. Whilst it is important to note that the dairy sector in Sardinia currently constitutes a fraction of the island's exports (CRENOS 2019), Giancarlo's criticisms reflected a widespread dissatisfaction with the historic prioritization by regional and central governments of the introduction of industry focused investment as opposed to looking into improving conditions of the economic activity already existent in Sardinia[81]. As studies on Sardinia's economy show, the collapse of the industrial sector following the Rebirth Plans came at great cost, not only in terms of a loss of jobs but also in the fragmentation of rural communities (Ruju 2018).

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[80] Sardinia lost a total of 13,603 soldiers, a mean of 138.6 out of 1000 compared to the peninsula mean of 104.9 (Brigaglia 2002: 9).

Lucia, a well-known and vocal feminist activist on the left of the movement went further, arguing that these failed economic programmes were not just indications of doomed modernization projects, they were at the heart of the raison'd'être of the island's political class. Criticizing Sardinia's status as a Special Autonomous Region she explained:

> 'autonomy was never applied i.e. an autonomy that was equipped with a Special Statute tied to the Italian constitution and which should have guaranteed great privileges but in reality none of this happened. On the contrary, in the name of autonomy, rivers of public funding, billions arrived in Sardinia which in theory should have helped Sardinia overcome great poverty, the so-called underdevelopment. In reality, that funding served only to enrichen multinationals that came here as well as a group of Sardinian families which became rich through political connections – who we call the 'borghesia compradora', (the buying bourgeoisie), that Sardinian political class that managed political life in Sardinia for decades. So, there was this coexistence. All the while development models were imported by force which were not compatible with the cultural, natural, traditional vocations in Sardinia'.

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[81] In terms of value added, the latest figures show that industry in Sardinia makes up 9.9% of the regional total, whilst agriculture a mere 4.6% (CRENOS 2019).

She stressed that the only rapport Sardinians *could* have with the Italian state was conflictual whilst also noting that the antagonism was not an 'institutional' one between state and the autonomous region as the latter merely represented a 'branch of the state' itself that 'executed state orders'. Rather 'the conflict has become one between state and the people'. For Lucia the Italian state's power lay in part in the dominance exerted by a regional political class closely embroiled with the economic interests of the state and peninsula elites and the continuation of existing social relations. Moreover, like Gabriele, Lucia similarly associated these elite interests with those of international forces, denouncing the Qatar Foundation's recent investments in Northern Sardinia which amongst other things had resulted in the privatization of hospital care and buying up of land. Crucially, she did not regard regional and state elites as incompatible, commenting on the acceptance in regional government of Qatar's investment:

> 'how do we reconcile these two presences [Qatar and Italy]? I.e., it's not a private person who arrives here and buys themselves a beautiful villa because they've fallen in love with Sardinia. Here they're acquiring territories, they're acquiring and controlling the political class. The Qatar case had been approved by everyone. By the centre-right, by the centre-left. So, as I was saying previously, the dependency relationship between the Italian state and Sardinia is mediated by Italian parties. You'll ask me but who are the members of Italian parties in Sardinia? Sardinians, Sardinians who are part of politics. There is a part of Sardinian politics that is absolutely compatible with the Italian state'.

For Lucia, these various elite forces shared a common interest in the preservation and expansion of private accumulation. The Qatar case was an example of the ways in which regional and state elites were welded together within a global system of accumulation that prioritized and *depended* on the interests of private investors and not those of the Sardinian population struggling through extreme poverty, precarity and the destruction of their material surroundings.

The issue of dependency was shared by others from very different parts of the movement. Antonello, a free-marketeer associated with more conservative circles explained:

> 'This is one of the weaknesses of the old Sardinian governments. They are too dependent on the continent, on the people leading, governing Italy. So as long as we have people who do not, who are too dependent from Rome, you cannot defend the interests of the Sardinians, as individuals, as families, as communities. And that is the issue with all that.'

Antonello's criticisms of the Sardinian government's dependency on the 'leading' role played by 'Rome' like the other accounts here discussed and confirmed by another free-marketeer Rosa, stressed a perceived incompatibility between Sardinian interests and government. Moreover, there was a sense that the challenge facing independentists resided not only in creating new political infrastructures but also in combatting people's ideological dependency. The dominance of Rome manifested in both failed attempts to respond to the unevenness of material forces and in people's attitudes and their limited conceptualization of the possible horizons available to them. Whilst exactly *who* activists regarded as elites or the Italian state often remained ambiguous, there was nevertheless a widespread convergence on the causes of Sardinia's continued marginalization, namely, the primacy of a select few who were seen as vestiges of a political and economic tradition that had given way to Sardinia's 'under-development'. Italian-based parties, government representatives, business and land owners, multinational corporations, were interconnected within a system driven by private accumulation that had both absorbed and diminished the needs and cultural expressions of 'ordinary' people. Failed programmes such as the Rebirth plans represented the continuation of a fractured state project unable to overcome the rigidity of class divides and service the diverse needs of communities, in Sardinia's case, national communities within its domain.

Much like Gramsci, theirs was in many ways a story about the pitfalls of both the Italian state and capitalist development, outlining similar tensions described by Gramsci in his assessment of the Italian state: the aggravation of class inequalities, corruption at the hands of political and economic elites interested in self-preservation, and the contradictions inherent in a state form ultimately unable to fulfil its promises of popular and national sovereignty. Their descriptions similarly detailed the mutually reinforcing relationship between economic relations and public attitudes and what one activist described as the 'cultural hegemony in a Gramscian sense' enjoyed by those in power despite these lingering fractures. The 'classe Borghese or compradora's perceived legitimacy partly stemmed from its influence over more 'informal' untransparent avenues of exchange and an extensive network of capillary power shaping people's perceptions of Sardinian society and identity. The key to understanding the sheer scope of the challenge facing independentism in Sardinia lay not only in accounting for its structural composition but also in its acceptance by Sardinians. The central obstacles for independentists were to find out what was happening behind the 'closed doors' of 'Regional Politics' (Igor).

Interestingly, it was a story that seemed to be recognized by people on the fringes or outside of the movement. Friends and acquaintances who were by no means independentist identified similar problems of corruption and inequality. At a conference held on the outskirts of Cagliari entitled: 'Self-determination: theory or reality?' organized by a small association[82] called the Federazione Alternativa Sardegna, similar themes emerged amongst proponents of groups associated with the centre- right in Sardinia, such as the Movimento Zona Franca (MZF) focused on instating a free-trade zone in Sardinia. A key figure behind (MZF), used his intervention to provide an outline of the history of Sardinia's relationship with the Italian peninsula and the continued failure by the latter to respect institutional arrangements on the island going back as far as the 18th century and Sardinia's cession to the House of Savoy. His account suggested that the Sardinian question was not merely rooted in the unequal relations between Rome and the periphery, but as such was an integral feature of the Italian state. This could be seen in the very legal structures defining the relationship between the island as a Special Region and the peninsula which had been significantly undervalued and underutilized, since the instatement of the statute. The issue of self-determination was one that not only spoke to a 'contemporary context' but to a longer story of oppression within which they were still necessarily embedded and which Sardinian activists necessarily had to consider.

What was striking about this particular event was the audience response which gave way to an animated exchange between activists and sympathisers, who in passionate terms described the struggles they faced living in Sardinia. Some interventions involved emotional and personal descriptions of experiences of precarity and exclusion; the departure of a retired teacher's sons to Rome and Milan due to the lack of jobs in Sardinia, a 'Left-leaning' workers' rights campaigner who had to live in mainland Italy for the majority of his life to work, and who lamented the Sardinian Left's development of any 'real change'. One speaker drew attention to the fact that in 'reality' the constitution doesn't exist. 'We're alone', 'there is no territorial continuity'. 'Where are the institutions? They're not here.' He described how Sardinians are escaping and living in a country where banks take precedence and where economic infrastructure in Sardinia is falling apart and noted how if you go to the industrial zones on the island they are like cemeteries. There was a feeling of abandonment, of frustration at the limited options Sardinians had in bringing about the changes they so desperately desired. Speakers in this instance attributed these limits to the political structure of the Italian state and the failure by Sardinia's unionist parties to adequately utilize legal powers it had as a special autonomous region which in theory provided the capability of creating a greater separation between the island and peninsula.

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[82] It was never clear to me who exactly was part of this association which no longer seems to exist, or how it was set up.

The accounts here described provide a glimpse of a common understanding of the struggle for national independence; namely, that it could not be divorced from a concern with the economic conditions shaping island life. The historic negation of Sardinian language, history and culture were intimately interwoven with economic inequality. Sardinia's political configuration was a direct product of these historically unequal social relations. Activist descriptions of the struggles they faced indicated the persistence of a political class closely aligned with central government that materialized not only in the economic policies adopted and a judicial system bent towards the criminalization of dissent, but dominated consensus amongst major regional parties, educational and research bodies, regional press outputs such as the Unione Sarda. It was a dependency that was intricately dispersed across Sardinian society through extensive clientele and absence of leadership by Sardinia's political class in a Gramscian sense, and as such symptomatic of the abnormal kinds of hegemony described by Gramsci in his critique of the Italian state which had been achieved in part through coercive measures. In short, activists were struggling with the continued effects of a longer history of passive revolution, a failed national-popular moment and limited possibilities for radical ruptures. Crucially, the accounts suggested that although activists regarded the Italian state as their primary antagonist, many also saw it as a participant within a broader 'global' or 'international' context of ordering. The struggle was not against an amorphous Italian state but a deeply uneven political and economic system of elite interests, multinationals, foreign investors, European directives, interested not on improving Sardinian conditions, but in extracting wealth and in turn self-determination from Sardinians themselves.

6.5 What Now? Building Credible Alternatives

At the 'Self-determination: Reality or Myth?' event, a constitutional law specialist from mainland Italy stressed the need for 'neutrality' in the discussion and the importance of creating '*credible*' proposals for change. Much to the audience's dismay, he argued that the answer to Sardinia's problems lay in unification and the better use of the existing statute and not in nationalist fragmentation. The latter could not rectify the central issues at the heart of independentist debate given that the 'renouncement of Italian domination' would not increase independence and self-determination in conditions of 'globalization'. Whilst he was not an independentist, his intervention in many ways encapsulated the particular significance credibility carried for activists themselves, namely, as a marker of the realizability of their demands and the extent to which these could be situated within existing political conditions given the various structural hurdles outlined above. What activists deemed credible was reflective of their engagement with the limited spaces for manoeuvre affording by existing conditions and their anxieties surrounding their peripheral status shaped by the primacy of a bloc of political and economic relations that were Sardinian, Italian and international in scope. Activists' own desires to stress their credibility in many respects represented an attempt to demonstrate to Sardinians and beyond that what independentists could feasibly do within such complex political landscapes was at the forefront of their approaches.

Their framings of credibility indicated a series of hegemonic discourses and relations to which they felt they needed to appeal. The issue of public perception for instance, stressed the state's ethico-political and economic influence in Sardinia. The importance of focusing on establishing credibility amongst the Sardinian public for activists like Lorenzo, was not only advantageous electorally but was a necessity given people's dependency on existing infrastructures. The movement could not afford to be 'abstract' in its claims but needed to focus on providing people with responses to existing structures shaping their livelihood such as job stability and state benefits in addition to the cultural and historical narratives that accompanied such material dependencies. People were 'fearful of change', 'fearful of losing what they have'. Credibility lay in the extent to which his party and others could provide adequate solutions to the issues experienced by a precarious majority who were wary of any radical transformation that risked eliminating the security the state nevertheless provided. For Lorenzo and others such as Michele, this entailed participation in state arranged forms of political mobilization in order to attain legitimacy amongst the public but also in order to combat a unionist Italian opposition which had maintained its power in part through the institutional arrangements tied to regional government. Michele, who had previously held a highly prestigious position within regional government prior to joining the independentist movement claimed that the latter's possible success lay in the extent to which it could 'beat state parties at their own game'.

The appeal to an international context of exchange as a central factor contributing to the movement's credibility similarly pointed to an overarching context of political and economic practice to which activists needed to appeal. The incorporation of an economic programme that could maximize Sardinia's potential for increased trade indicated a sense in which people's lives were dependent on its connection to a much more extensive 'outside' network of economic competition and political recognition. For Leonardo from the PdS, the appeal of greater participation beyond Italy lay in the ways in which it could provide ideological reinforcement of independentism as means to ‘freedom’, ‘tolerance’, and ‘openness[83]’. While he was critical of the EU as it currently stood, criticizing its bureaucracy and tepid response to Rajoy’s government reaction to the Catalan referendum which was occurring during the fieldwork, he saw in the EU, ‘a space of peace’ and a potential means through which independentisms across Europe could strengthen their claims for national recognition through the provision of a collaborative network. ProgRES activist, Marco, also noted that the EU provided a potential means for international support for secessionist movements and as such constituted an important domain for the development of democratic processes of sovereignty through an expanded dialogue with international forces. This dialogue was crucial in ‘removing fear and doubt’ surrounding independence amongst the wider population. European recognition and participation were central to fostering confidence amongst Sardinians in the viability of such projects. For both, the EU provided an overarching ‘transnational’ context that provided economic and political incentives for national independence that could relieve the destabilizing effects secession would ultimately entail.

Activists’ concerns with credibility also alluded to a sense of being confined to treading an uneasy line between divergence and convergence, appeal and rejection. They seemed united in their recognition that an effective independentism was one that could create a ‘unifying’ political project that not only responded to issues of inequality and cultural and political marginalization but could do so in a way that was both cognisant and sensitive to people’s situation and dependence on things as they were. The state represented both a major contributing factor behind Sardinia’s political and economic status and an important adjudicator of the terms of Sardinia’s relationship with an overarching international system. A tension between conforming and rejecting existing political and economic infrastructures was evident at a public assembly organized by the PA coalition in the run up to the 2018 general election. The event revolved around activists and members of the public sharing ideas and plans for future mobilization and a discussion about what should and could be done to rectify perceived institutional, socio-economic, political problems afflicting Sardinia. Speakers vividly described their experiences of a range of challenges: lack of adequate infrastructure, the prevalence of clientelism in higher offices and local government, the failure to adequately safeguard Sardinian culture and language, poor agricultural and small business performance, obstacles for the organization of community initiatives. The common theme throughout the event and in my exchanges afterwards, was that Sardinia needed a ‘credible’ alternative that could both offer a ‘new’ approach that gave voice to Sardinians and the ‘left-behind’ at a grassroots level and which could function within the existing contours of local and regional government (Laura and Giulia). ‘Credible’ change referred to the need to establish an organic connection with the existing experiences of a Sardinian people but also a rupture *within* that experience. The PA coalition’s slogan of ‘la rivoluzione tranquilla’, the ‘calm revolution’, used in their election campaign was indicative of this desire for an approach that managed to insert an ‘independentist bloc’ within existing political structures but which was no less committed to constructing a politics that did not represent a continuation of the status quo. Activists were keen to move away from collaboration with state interests whilst simultaneously emphasising the importance of ‘territory’ as potential ground for the fight against neo-liberalism and its destructive effects on communities.

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[83] These are all terms Leonardo used to explain his position.

The issue of credibility, however, was not only a marker for this perceived duality of political strategies. It was also a way for activists to problematize this tension. Such an approach was seen in accounts that framed credibility around the issue of ideological credibility or coherence and adherence to Left-Right alignment echoing the comparative literature outlined above. Paolo, ex-member of IRS and ProgRES, argued that the main challenge facing the movement could be summed up with one word; ‘costanza’, which can translate to tenacity, steadfastness, or constancy. For Paolo the movement was suffering under a tendency to overlook the importance of putting forward a ‘clear’ position. He reflected on the early successes of IRS, noting that they had made clear to people ‘what they were, and who they were’. Independentists needed to stick to ‘original principles’ and thereby make it clear to people what their position is, ‘if you conceal it, you’re doing someone else’s job’. He maintained that independentists were helping political factions who were not pro-independence by not sticking to independence as the central aim. Like Davide he also saw success as something that needed a long-term programme of action: ‘We need to work without rushing, we need to be ourselves and this entails a process that lasts 20-30 years’.

But even here, the issue of ideological consistency, coherence and constancy was not just a question of clear messaging or adherence to policy. Instead, it directly problematized the existing interconnections between politics and economics underlying the Sardinian struggle for national independence. For people like Adriano, issues of clientelism also affected the movement. The position of parties such as the PSd’Az, the PdS and to a lesser extent the PA, were viewed by some on the left as pure rhetoric, not at all conducive to the kinds of ruptures that were needed. Anti-fascist activist and writer Angelo, described the issue in the following exacerbated terms:

> ‘Another problem is the inconsistency of the independentist movements! Within them there are different illnesses – there is the problem of ‘leaderism’. There are too many divisions between the groups that function as if they all followed a guru in an almost religious way without asking why. Then there is the issue with ‘electoralism’. There isn’t enough base work being done. Many independentist groups think too much about elections. The fight should be every day and not only during elections.’

The parties listed above suffered from an over-emphasis on electoral politics and not on the long-term work of establishing a collaborative relationship with people on the ground and which was committed to a politics of national self-determination. Such criticisms were particularly marked amongst activists on the Left, many of whom were desirous of an ‘independentist bloc’ that could as ProgRES member Giuseppe claimed, combat the persistence of inequalities tied to current regional and state governance.

Unlike the credibility framings outlined thus far the emphasis was less on adherence or appeal to existing state infrastructures and more on the development of a grassroots movement that placed a class critique that did not diminish the incompatibility of Sardinian national sovereignty and continued adherence to capitalist social relations at the heart of its aims. For Adriano, an active member of anarchist, anti-fascist and anti-militarist fringes of the movement, ‘self-determination could only mean effective governance by the people that placed at the forefront of discussion not only independence from Italy but dependence on a neoliberal economic system…’ It was necessary activists ‘took [their] activity to the people […] and [developed] a series of struggles, a series of disputes that exposed contradictions and which would bit by bit allow us to move forward, acquire political legitimacy and begin to discuss goals for the real movement to get a foothold’, something that representatives of the main Sardist parties had failed to do. The possibilities for change and the creation of in Adriano’s case a ‘legitimate’ alternative needed to go hand-in-hand with an approach that recognized and exposed the uneven effects of capitalist development intrinsic to Sardinian people’s experiences of inequality in order to create a ‘popular’ movement. Genuine avenues for popular self-determination lay in combatting ‘la classe compradora’ in political and economic terms, bringing the exploitation and impoverishment of the Sardinian population to the fore. In a similar vein, Andrea, communist, independentist and active member of the Circolo Me-TI, explained that the movement needed to:

> ‘create a people based on the materiality of their lives, on the material problems of their lives, and also, successively, the social constructions that emerge from these material problems […] If we want to put in simpler terms, an independentist party can’t ask its own people for their votes because it is independentist but because it makes them better’.

6.6 Concluding Thoughts

Activists’ preoccupation with credibility provides us with important insights for our analysis, drawing attention to some of the ways in which they interpreted the horizons of possible manoeuvre. Their discussions pointed to a widespread concern with the political possibilities available to them as well as a notable convergence on the view that Sardinian independentism was not just about territorial autonomy but represented a response to the effects of economic inequality and corruption. Sardinia’s national marginalization signalled internal fractures within the Italian state and was symptomatic of the divisive effects created by the preservation of ‘elite’ interests and the introduction of economic policies that did not alleviate the structural challenges faced by the Sardinian population. Importantly, their concerns with the development of credible independentism pointed to some of the ways in which they felt constrained to respond to the limited openings afforded by a bloc that not only manifested in the structural organization of the island but in an ‘intellectual and moral’ influence over people’s attitudes towards politics and the national question. Their accounts sketched a sense of their being inserted within a bloc that manifested in a dialectical fusion of structure and superstructure and in cross-class alliances between forces in Sardinia and the peninsula. Their primary political opponent, namely a regional economic and political elite with ties to central government, enjoyed a political primacy founded not on a genuinely national-popular expression of democratic will but through the subversion thereof in the way of clientelist agreements, the maintenance of a highly dependent workforce, mass acquiescence and the preservation of historic class relations.

Echoing observations made by comparativist scholars previously, the obstacles activists alluded to in their discussions were similarly not easily categorizable as national or international in nature but indicated an amalgamation of issues that traversed the boundaries between these ‘domains’. Significantly, the basis of the continuum between the national and international was primarily framed around the machinations of capitalist production, its circulation and development. The nation and capitalist forms of accumulation were treated as being mutually reinforcing whether in the aggravation of inequality in Sardinia or in the possible reformation of these conditions in ways that could better serve a Sardinian population. Sardinia’s national question could not be removed from a consideration of class relations and a historic failure by government to ameliorate poor working conditions, the fragmentation of communities as a result of unemployment and uneven development. These fractures were widely regarded as being crucial contributing factors to Sardinia's cultural oppression and conditions of dependency.

Independentists needed to remain cognisant of their insertion within a political and social context intimately tied to the hierarchies, practices, and narratives favoured by a political class that had shown itself to be little interested in transforming Sardinia. An effective movement hinged on the extent in which it managed to account for the historicity of its placement within such difficult social conditions. This awareness meant that the challenge facing independentism was twofold: on the one hand it needed to be conducive to a transformative and popular movement, on the other, given the structural constraints outlined above, it needed to be able to function within a state apparatus that was largely succeeding at neutralizing Sardinian opposition. Indeed, what the accounts here outlined suggest, is that activists were grappling with not only a desire for greater territorial, economic and political control but the disciplining or 'absorbing' power of a state form premised on the negation of the peripherization of classes, 'national' communities and subjectivities. Activists were having to engage with the legacies of the passive nature of Sardinia's inclusion within the Italian state and as a result were split between the pursuit of 'revolution' or 'reformation' (Davidson 2016: 97).

The concerns with credibility thus indicated a couple of central contradictions. One lay at the heart of their programmes and the other at the heart of the national form they were seeking to reject. Indeed, their criticisms of Sardinia's marginalization alluded to the inherent partiality of the state form in conditions of advanced capitalism. Moreover, the desire by some to obtain national recognition and statehood in order to better appeal to existing conditions, pointed to a movement bound to replicate a political discourse and productive logic that had been foundational to their conditions of subalternity. We can draw parallels here between Chatterjee's examination of the ways in which the materialization of nationalism in post-colonial India was bound to the reproduction of logics of modernity and development that had been integral to India's under-development and colonial experience (Chatterjee: 1986). We find a similar dynamic here, namely, a tension between a desire for national statehood, recognition and participation within a global network of capitalist exchange and a critique of Sardinia's current conditions that problematized the very basis of these interconnections as inherently contradictory. As we saw, activists were often aware of these underlying tensions. The issue of ideological credibility referred precisely to this perceived incongruence in independentists' position. How could an independent Sardinian state avoid suffering from the same partialities that stemmed from capitalist relations of production if it merely sought to replicate or appeal to these in its own terms?

Crucially, what the accounts here suggest is that they were not simply naïve actors, subject to the hegemonic powers of a wider international system of states and global capital. They were in many ways responding critically to the political power the nation-state form continues to have within this system as a potential means of resistance and contestation. We find in their accounts a 'duality' of ways of seeing, namely, a rejection and appreciation of the weaknesses of a given historical juncture but simultaneously an appreciation of the material influence and necessities it poses (Davidson 2016: 69). The following passage from Gramsci proves instructive in making sense of this seeming embrace or acceptance of the contradictions of the national and nationalist form:

> 'The co-existence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other in effective action, is not simply a product of self-deception [*malafede*] […] In these cases the contrast between thought and action cannot but be the expression of profounder contrasts of a social historical order. It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic […] But that same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in "normal times" – that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate' (Gramsci 1971: 326-327).

What we see is that activists' acknowledgement or stress on a politics that prioritized situated ruptures was indicative of their appreciation of the inherently 'reformist' nature of nationalism and the continued political and strategic significance of the state as a means through which new conceptions and political distributions could be secured. The nation represented *both* a 'point of departure' (Morton 2007: 6) and a 'point of arrival' (Bruff 2010a: 623) in circumstances in which the transformist nature of the state continued to trump the development of 'new solutions' (Gramsci 1971: 106), where 'restoration' trumped 'revolution'. In the words of Gramsci: 'no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for movement' (Gramsci 1971: 106).

Chapter 7: Whose/Who's Sovereign?

> 'The modern Prince, the myth-Prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a social component in which a collective will – one that is recognized and, to some extent, has asserted itself in action – has already taken shape' (Gramsci 2007: 247).

7.1 Introduction

This chapter brings sovereignty back into focus, examining more directly how activists situated the term within their objectives and approaches to the Sardinian national question. Through a Gramscian lens that frames sovereignty's definition around myth, the chapter continues to investigate the extent to which it was understood as delineating ways of *doing* politics whilst also emphasizing the significance of the shared appreciation of the horizons of possible action considered in the previous chapter. The analysis shows that their engagement with sovereignty was similarly influenced by this wider understanding of the purposes and roots of Sardinian independentism and the push and pull between a credible politics of rupture and situatedness. More specifically, it argues that sovereignty's signification marked notable antagonisms within the movement that stemmed from activists' identification with a politics of revolution/restoration. For those who liked the term, 'sovereignty' represented a crucial means through which they could formulate a new hegemonizing myth capable of mobilizing a national-popular will and situating Sardinia within an international system of political and economic cooperation. For sovereignty's critics, the term was symbolic of the myth of the Italian state as an inherently partial political form incapable of shifting the horizons of politics as they knew it and creating a popular movement. Of course, these distinctions were by no means completely binary with many activists situating themselves somewhere in between as seen in Chapter 5.

What the accounts examined suggest is that sovereignty claims were less about creating rigid lines between intra/interstate politics and more about the very experience of being embedded within uneven political and economic conditions and the possible forms political manoeuvre could take. Those who used the term or looked upon it favourably supported a transformation of Sardinia that preserved private capital as a means of attaining individual *and* national freedom, whereas those who were sceptical regarded the overturning of capitalist production and Sardinian emancipation as one and the same. These varying views marked divisions amongst activists, especially in terms of their relationship with the state and regional government. Crucially, they show that sovereignty was not framed around the demand for some sort of static sovereign authority, nor was it simply an expression of a desire for national and cultural recognition but was indicative of the inherently partial form of the Italian state and the divisions created by the legacies of passive revolution in Sardinia.

The chapter begins with a return to Gramsci's usage of myth as a signifier for the peculiarities of the bourgeois state rooted in dynamics of force and consent and as a hegemonizing political praxis aimed at creating new claims to the universal. Both of these dimensions are helpful in making sense of the role and significance attributed to sovereignty by activists as a) as signifier of an existing and deep-rooted hegemonic order and b) as myth-making i.e. as a means through which they could articulate alternative discourses. The chapter proceeds with a return to some of the characterizations of sovereignty encountered in the field which we considered in Chapter 5 and which provide a sense of the divergences amongst activists over their usage of the term. Such contrasts stemmed from different approaches to Sardinian independentism and the structural challenges considered in the previous chapter. The chapter finishes with an examination of the implications these varying sovereignty framings have for how we might interpret the term's use amongst minority nationalists in Sardinia. An examination of these accounts contributes to appreciating sovereignty's problematization by minority nationalists, dispelling the image of minority nationalisms as homogenous movements simply concerned with reformulating exclusionary either/or binaries.

7.2 Hegemony, Myth and the Establishment of Political Horizons

Myth as we saw in Chapter 3, was a recurring theme in Gramsci's reflections, in particular, in his discussions on the state, religion (see Gramsci 1996: 195; 2007: 217) and the failures of Italian political elites (Gramsci 2007: 261; Liguoro n.d.)[84]. It served to underline the idealism he frequently attributed to the secular, democratic forces that had failed to create in any concrete sense a genuine national-popular will within the nascent Italian state (Sotiris 2017). Significantly, however, myth was also reflective of two notable dimensions of Gramsci's use of hegemony; namely, 1) as a signifier of the particularities of the capillary nature of bourgeois power that was not founded on mere coercion in a material or brute sense but also on consent (the integral state), and 2) as a signifier of an expansive process of 'production' of 'universal' 'conceptions of the world' (Frosini 2016: 524; Thomas 2009b). Inspired in part by the 'Sorelian myth' which he described as 'a political ideology expressed neither in the form of a cold utopia nor as a learned theorizing but rather by the creation of a concrete phantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organise its collective will' (Gramsci 1971: 126),

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[84] See also notes number 104 and 127 from the 9th notebook, number 37 from the 13th notebook, number 48 from the 15th notebook and 21 from the 17th notebook available online at The Gramsci Project site: http://www.gramsciproject.org/

Gramsci used the term myth to describe a political discourse that fused passion and collectively shared conceptions of the world (Liguori n.d.).

On a first level, the category of myth enabled an engagement with the significance of discourses such as religion and nationalism that functioned as important unifying forces and 'neutralizing' means through which potential opposition could be stifled (Frosini 2016: 530). An appreciation of the 'mythic' nature of these discourses was crucial in making sense of the ways in which the emergence of the bourgeoisie and liberal state had gone hand in hand with the establishment of a parliamentary system that relied on consent and the '[involvement of] the popular masses' through, for example, the doctrine of 'popular sovereignty' (Frosini 2012: 65). National and religious myths provided a 'popular element', helping to strengthen the political primacy of state forces through its legitimization in people's 'conceptions of the world' in the name of a collective 'we' and in their power in eliciting 'passion' and mass mobilization (Frosini 2016: 524).

His appreciation of the significance of myth, however, also extended to discussions about the kinds of political approaches that needed to be adopted by progressive political forces. Indeed, Gramsci did not only use myth to critique the nationalist and democratic pretences of Italian elites, for example, but also saw transformative potential in its use and development. Whilst he was wary of an approach that lost sight of the significance of organization and critical reflection in the formation of effective collective movements that did not fall into patterns of 'restoration' and 'reorganization' (Gramsci 1971: 129-130), he nevertheless insisted on the view that politics was passionate (Gramsci 1971: 139-140). An approach to study and leadership that made room for the passionate nature of politics was tremendously important in being able to gain an adequate understanding of social conditions and/or consolidate strong bonds with those being represented as agential forces with whom a progressive political movement would have to be established (Gramsci 1971: 418). As a hegemonizing practice, myth had an expansive capability through which inclusive 'collective wills' could be developed that could help construct 'dynamic' emancipatory movements capable of replacing myths that went before (Gramsci 2007: 246-249; Thomas 2013: 32).

As an expansive and neutralizing exercise, the production of myth was thus emblematic of an important tension Gramsci identified throughout his notebooks and which was central to understanding the nature of class struggle in the context of the modern liberal state, namely, between revolution and restoration. Myth marked the partiality at the heart of the 'bourgeois project' and the 'oxymoronic' nature of its hegemony (Frosini 2012: 6) which stemmed from its being founded on 'two different poles (those of assimilation and dissimilation, expansion and repression, and so on)' (Frosini 2012: 72). On the one hand, it referred to the rootedness of capitalist relations which found expression in a popular project that was limited in kind given its preservation of class relations (Frosini 2012: 65). On the other, it was a symbol of a (necessary) form of political ideology capable of mobilizing the population within the limited openings afforded within the modern liberal state.

As I aim to show, Gramsci's formulation of myth provides us with a useful lens for our examination of activists' sovereignty claims which marked similar tensions as those identified in Gramsci's usage of myth with some treating sovereignty as a means through which a Sardinian national will could be formulated and by others as symbolic of the fractured transformist politics that had long characterized political relations in Sardinia. In line with our findings in Chapter 5, there were many who situated themselves somewhere in between these two positions. What we see throughout, is that sovereignty constituted a form of myth making, reflecting once again its relational construction as a response to the legacies of uneven development and passive revolution considered previously and a widespread sense of being caught between systems. Sovereignty's definition reflected the tensions outlined in Chapter 6 between a desire for a reformist approach and more radical ruptures that could mobilize within the limited openings afforded by Sardinia's peripheral position.

7.3 Moving Horizons and Creating Sardinian Myths

In the small town of San Gavino Monreale, once the site of a very large foundry in the Campidano plains, the inauguration of the artist Sergio Putzu's murals was taking place. The images, painted on the facades of sun-bleached buildings lining the Via Eleonora d'Arborea, a road named after the well-remembered Sardinian heroine, judge and symbol of the island's last independent judicate, depicted scenes of traditional agricultural life; men tilling fields, the harvesting of fruit and grain, couples in traditional dress, textiles from the local area, the passage of seasons. The images painted in earthy sepia tones covered the fronts of houses with nostalgic portrayals of both the austerity and richness of the local communities of the past.

The event was also the site of my first interview with Leonardo, one of the proponents of the 'external' characterization of sovereignty considered in Chapter 5. As seen previously, when asked how he defined sovereignty, Leonardo described it as a central precondition for the 'management' of Sardinian 'interdependence' and a necessary means through which Sardinians could 'enter the world', 'relate to others' and 'build an 'open', 'prosperous' 'just society without having to, as we have now, shall we say, be subjected to the decisions of others'. The term denoted the freedom to decide both within and beyond the state, representing a way of generating greater national control, in addition to collaborative internationalist engagements with other nations in Europe and beyond:

> 'We are talking about an independentism that is open and wants to insert Sardinia within Europe, within the world […] One of the great forces for regeneration of the European project can come from non-violent, democratic, progressive independentisms represented by parties such as the PdS, Esquerra Republicana, the SNP, forces which clearly have a supportive Europeanist vision; a pluricultural Europeanist vision'.

International recognition constituted a basic prerequisite for the manifestation of Sardinian self-determination while the commitment to international collaboration was a sign of independentism's openness and commitment to a 'pluralist' pacifist form of politics.

Of course, Leonardo's account of sovereignty was much more complex than simply a reflection of a demand for an 'open', internationalist approach to independentism. He also characterized sovereignty as a 'poetic' practice that could enable the 'production of something' distinctly Sardinian that was not subject to the actions and interests of an external force such as the Italian state:

> 'I want there to be, you could say, a differentiating line, i.e. that we Sardinians distinguish ourselves because we know how to build an open nation. The idea here is to regain some capacity for control, and to demonstrate that we exist, that we are here, and that perhaps we can also say something original in a world where even small parts of humanity manage to do something good and can emerge as an example, a model. Thus, someone could say: 'but look at Sardinians, at what they have done', you know? Which is to say, sovereignty from a *poetic* point of view, i.e. the capacity to produce something and thus not delegate, not delegate responsibility, not delegate liberty. I see that Sardinians today are still too afraid to take responsibility to do things'.

Sovereignty represented control, the attainment of recognition and simultaneously an expansive activity through which Sardinians more generally, could feel they played an active role in Sardinia's self-determination and the establishment of a Sardinian voice within an international context of collaboration and recognition. The weight he placed on an 'expansive' project was particularly evident in his discussions of the need to cultivate national consciousness which for him, constituted the central challenge facing independentists:

> 'I see a people that still has to come to terms with its history, its symbols, and the best parts of its past, which is necessary for translating into the future, for taking the leap and for courage. Because you know, when you think you have no history, it's difficult, it's very difficult to think that you have a future. Autonomy today is based on this idea that autonomy was simply a way for Sardinians to be Italian and to get help from Italy because we had not produced anything of importance, anything that justified our existence as a nation. For this reason, we have the issue of national consciousness'.

The ‘reclaiming’ of Sardinian history and culture represented a critical process in the construction of an independentist project. The significance of national consciousness not only lay in its being Sardinian but in its potential for the development of a new understanding of what politics can be and do, in the cultivation of a unifying national discourse that could combat the inherited view of Sardinians as naturally inferior. Much like other activists, Leonardo, related this need for an expansive popular discourse of Sardinian self-determination to the lingering effects of Sardinia’s historic cultural negation. Gesturing to the murals that surrounded us in San Gavino that afternoon, he traced the roots of the lack of national consciousness amongst Sardinians to hundreds of years of exploitation and colonial rule. The latter had contributed to the festering of ‘a type of self-racism’ amongst the wider population and early autonomists who regarded Sardinia a ‘failed nation’. The challenge facing the movement was structural, ideological and embedded in the ways Sardinians felt about politics and the national question:

> ‘Because of having suffered for so long under an absence of national consciousness, Sardinians’ fears on the topic are many. The first is that independence is pursued through violence. This is an issue that I think we have overcome after declaring ourselves in favour of a non-violent independentism. There was a fear of closure, of regression which I think we have also overcome with a non-nationalistic independentism, i.e. an independentism that doesn’t have a backward idea of purity but is inclusive and which aims to create a society with everyone who lives in Sardinia. We have demonstrated that we have economic projects, that we can govern without fear […] Clearly, we have to contrast on the one end the fatalism amongst Sardinians who are disillusioned, and the other, political forces who fear this moving of horizons which we clearly need in order to combat an Italian state that perhaps in a less evident way than in other situations of national conflict, nevertheless, defends its prerogatives, i.e. that isn’t there for Sardinia’s requests, wanting instead to control Sardinia’s politics’.

Implicit in Leonardo’s account was a much less ‘poetic’ treatment of sovereignty that regarded the cultivation of Sardinian national consciousness as not only entailing the creation of alternative interpretations of Sardinia’s history and the possibilities available to it, but also went hand-in-hand with ‘the challenge of managing sovereignty’. Whilst he valued a ‘poetic’ exercise, he remained nevertheless adamant that they not lose sight of the practical manifestation of this reclamation of ‘horizons’. The awareness of independentists’ situation within a very specific material context was crucial to being able to construct a genuinely transformative alternative to Italian-based politics. This entailed on the one hand not underestimating the power and influence of Italian forces *and* the strategic importance of the state for independentists themselves. He proceeded to provide a number of examples of the achievements made by the PdS in regional government including the reopening of the main 131 motorway, management of water, the push for a Sardinian tax agency. He justified these on the basis that:

> 'This is a way of supporting a cultural work, a civic mobilization work, an action of government that says to Sardinians: independentism is credible, you can trust that independentism improves your lives […] We've demonstrated we have economic projects, that if we go into government, we can overcome that fear of not being capable. For this reason, we say national consciousness, managed sovereignty, practised sovereignty are the two challenges'.

There was a sense here in which political transformation needed to be conducted through recognized state institutions, giving weight to the PdS as an independentist alternative that could 'get things done'. Indeed, his description of the management of sovereignty mirrored the PdS' emphasis on the development of an independentism that can have a 'presence in regional and local institutions' (Pala 2016: 259) encapsulated in its slogan of 'facciamo lo stato', 'let's make/do the state'. In its manifesto, the PdS describes its political objectives as being driven by a need for 'a Sardinian government that puts in place real, honest, courageous, efficient solutions that enables new steps towards sovereignty, national consciousness, and the self-determination of Sardinian people' (Maninchedda & Sedda, n.d.: 2). It states:

> 'sovereignty in action fortifies national consciousness, trust in oneself, and the courage to take on new and always larger responsibilities. One step follows another. National consciousness always needs to translate into the practice of sovereignty in order for it not to weaken or freeze into pure utopia, representation, testimony. Practised sovereignty makes itself stronger and more efficient in so far as a Sardinian national conscience is felt, in so far as the concrete action […] is inserted in a collective vision and historical horizon […] It is necessary to decide and become every day that which you want to be tomorrow. Because only in the selection of a goal and in the action that moves towards an imagined or glimpsed horizon, you can begin to build a Sardinia of the future, its own country, its own State, its own Republic' (Maninchedda & Sedda n.d.: 2-3).

There is a shared sense in both Leonardo's and the PdS' accounts that sovereignty represents a political practice that can reinforce national consciousness. Crucially, national consciousness is associated with a unified conception of Sardinia and its horizons, whereas sovereignty refers to its practical counterpart, its material manifestation. In the latter passage, national consciousness and sovereignty are dialectically related, reliant on one another and fused in a holistic approach that sees concrete action and imagined horizons as one and the same. Without sovereignty and the ability to put national consciousness into practice, the latter becomes 'utopia'. Simultaneously, national consciousness provides the basis for the development of a unified sovereign will. The use of 'translate' in many ways, mirrors Gramsci's own employment of the term, alluding to a process of transformation characterized by the materialization of a unified Sardinian nation or republic beyond mere representation or testimony (Gramsci 2007: 52).

What we find in these accounts is a duality of purpose attributed to sovereignty. On the one hand, sovereignty entailed an expansionist, poetic exercise in freedom, on the other, it entailed a very concrete practice of contestation within regional, local and crucially, state bodies. Indeed, we see sovereignty's relational construction at play here, with its definition reflecting a concern with the development of credible political strategies and an engagement with existing social relations. We see in Leonardo's description of the historic roots behind the widespread view that Sardinians were inferior, an appreciation of the capillary nature of the Italian state's influence in the region which manifested in ways people understood and saw themselves at large. Crucially, sovereignty represented a mythologizing exercise, one that could bring into alignment people's self-understanding, conceptions of the world, political possibilities and Sardinia's political configuration in an alternative unified national will.

This duality of purpose attributed to sovereignty was not only characteristic of Leonardo or the PdS' approach. In a different interview, PSd'Az councillor, Lorenzo, who initially defined sovereignty in conventional terms, similarly presented an account that associated sovereignty with a means for the development of recognized discourses of legitimacy and action and an expansive political process through which an emancipatory unified Sardinia could be established. As we saw previously in Chapter 5, for Lorenzo sovereignty primarily represented a juridical term: 'a basic feature of statehood' alongside territory: 'Constitutional doctrine teaches us that for a state to exist it needs to have three elements: a territory, a people that inhabits the territory, and the sovereignty of the people in the territory in question' (see p. 112-113). In keeping with our findings discussed in Chapter 5, namely, that activists often subscribed to different definitions of the notion of sovereignty in accordance with an and/or logic, there were nevertheless some notable similarities in both Leonardo and Lorenzo's usage. Much like Leonardo, Lorenzo was keen to stress the openness of the PSd'Az's approach which he claimed emerged out of 'the great European federalist' tradition 'at a time when almost no one spoke of Europe, of the connection between a whole system of European peoples and of the world'. In his view, the primary concern for the party was 'overturning' the 'myth':

> 'that our independence means separatism. In reality we want to unite ourselves more and better with all the European nations at a level of equality. This thus means having statehood in order to engage with the rest of the world, and thus being able to decide on our own territory what should be its politics. At the heart of the lexical issue sovereigntism, sovereignty, independentism, autonomy, I think that in almost 100 years

> we’ve been on an adventure to express, to translate into a political project, the unstoppable desire for freedom of Sardinians’.

Similar to Leonardo, Lorenzo’s allusion to a European system of recognition pointed to a wider international context of equality and freedom. There was a sense in which the possibility of national expression lay both within and beyond the state. He criticized the EU as it currently stood on the grounds that it was a ‘bureaucratic and technocratic’ body that homogenized cultural and individual particularity but nevertheless emphasized the importance of Europe as a potential space for greater collaboration and freedom of a Europe of the regions.

Like Leonardo and most activists I spoke to, Lorenzo’s formulation of sovereignty reflected an attempt to engage with the particular structural hurdles shaping Sardinian independentism. He viewed the Sardinian struggle as one that was rooted in a much longer history of political resistance. Invoking the well-known anthropologist, Giovanni Lilliu’s famous phrase of the Sardinian resistance constant (see p. 80), for Lorenzo the Sardist cause was the latest in a long series of struggles between islanders and colonizing forces. The aim for activists such as himself was to ‘reappropriate’ their ‘history, government and future’. He critiqued ‘autonomy’, claiming that it was insufficient given the challenges Sardinia faced today and needed to be ‘rewritten’. However, as we saw in Chapter 6, the issue of credibility and the feeling of being ‘caught’ between systems and of having to play catch-up was an important one for Lorenzo. The state as it was currently organized ‘took advantage of Sardinia’ through the guise of ‘formality’, limiting the possibility for the island’s development and liberty. Central to rectifying Sardinia’s marginalization for Lorenzo was the need to develop actionable policies in regional and local government. As a proponent of the most successful Sardist party, he praised the role played by the PSd’Az in the regional office, conceding that it was ‘the little the party had been able to do’. Despite representing a hindrance to the expression of economic and political freedom, the state continued to be important for Lorenzo, constituting the basic means through which they could ‘engage with the rest of the world’ and retell a Sardinian national story.

Central to this actionable approach was economic policy and the island’s limited connection to a global market. He stressed that: ‘real freedom is obtained not only with the ideal of political independence. It is really important to be able to freely choose, and you can only do that if you are also economically independent’. For Lorenzo this entailed economic freedom and the capacity to engage with a global market with minimal state intervention. Sardinia’s ‘competitiveness’ lay in its ‘unrepeatable products’: ‘its environment, its landscape, its food, its material and immaterial culture’ which needed to be developed through a ‘model that values this specificity, this particularity'. He went on: 'We're convinced that if we had the possibilities of defining the economic policies in full independence, we would be able to adopt a series of provisions that would render the island particularly attractive businesswise'. Sovereignty was equated with greater political and economic freedom and crucially a process of *translation* through which pervasive myths surrounding Sardism as a politics of separation could be contested.

Lorenzo and Leonardo's accounts stood out for a number of reasons. The similarities in their approaches were surprising given the tensions that exist between the PdS and PSd'Az[85]. Although they initially defined sovereignty in different terms, they both related it to a similar interest in the development of an independentism that prized individual and national liberty and the cultivation of a unifying national consciousness which could embed itself within already existing political and economic structures. Sovereignty was an expression of a politics of situated rupture par excellence, representing on the one hand a means through which activists could rewrite 'myths' and thus transform the horizons of possible political and cultural expression, and on the other, develop a manageable and flexible approach that could be expressed through existing state institutions and an economic and political domain of interstate exchange. For both, the struggle for Sardinia's national independence was a response to a past history of exclusion that manifested in a lack of freedom and in the very ways Sardinians understood themselves, their histories and the horizons of what politics could be and do. The challenge facing activists was not only the establishment of political primacy in Sardinia but in also winning over Sardinian people's minds and their attitudes towards the national question. Evidenced in Leonardo's description of a 'poetic practice' and Lorenzo's calls to rewrite existing myths, sovereignty represented a means through which a unifying Sardinian national will capable of bringing Sardinia's territorial, political, economic constitution and people's national consciousness into alignment could be brought to the fore. Importantly, sovereignty's ties to statehood and international recognition were not regarded as a hindrance to its political potential. If anything, they were key factors contributing to the term's association with transformation.

As I would come to learn over the course of the next 6 months and as I have already signalled in chapter 5, not everyone shared this outlook when it came to the concept of sovereignty. The term's use was a source of serious contention amongst other factions within the movement, particularly those on the left who vehemently rejected the PdS and PSd'Az on the basis of their relationship with regional government and alliances with regional branches of the Italian centre-left and centre-right. Key figures at the helm of both parties such as Christian Solinas and Paolo Maninchedda were routinely criticized for their failure to seriously combat corruption and create transformative policies that could increase scope for Sardinian self-determination. The use of sovereignty was regarded as an indication of a lack of commitment to national independence, an attempt to complicate matters through ambiguous claims and pursue a politics of reform through the 're-branding' of independentist politics thus divorcing it from a truly revolutionary or radical content. Moreover, sovereignty's more recent association with unionist forces particularly, the emerging far-right was denounced on the grounds that it was incompatible with Sardinian self-determination. It reproduced a mystified notion of Italian national homogeneity that did not account for political corruption at the hands of Italian government nor the cultural differences that existed across Italy which were the result of a politics focused on 'perpetuating their subalternity' (Pili 2018).

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[85] The PdS emerged out of a split from the PSd'Az led by Paolo Maninchedda in 2013. Tensions between both respective parties then intensified in the wake of the PSd'Az's decisive shift to the far-right and alliance with the Northern League, or Lega at the time I was conducting fieldwork. The PdS has since been highly critical of the PSd'Az.

Whilst there was much that differentiated the PdS and PSd'Az, especially following the latter's decisive shift to the far-right in recent years, they both shared a similar reputation in other corners of the movement as being far-removed from the daily struggles and experiences of the Sardinian population; their electoral and political successes were seen as indications of their insertion within the machinations of politics as usual. I recall one activist's (Alessandro) description of their enclosure within the cool labyrinthian confines of the large 1980s complex of the Regional Council in Cagliari where I met Lorenzo, with its tinted windows, concrete pillars, large quiet halls, private coffee bars and security checks. It was symbolic of an independentism that was detached from the bustle of streets around it, from the experience of the people they represented. I also recall the stark shift in the audience response back at the inauguration in San Gavino when a local activist spoke in Sard. It contrasted drastically with the rest of the speakers; well-known council and town officials, intellectuals. The street went silent. In the words of an activist with me at the time, it was still unusual for people to hear 'their language' at these 'events'.

7.4 Sovereignty as Reform and Antithesis

At an anti-militarist march in central Cagliari, protesters from across anti-fascist, independentist, socialist, communist and anarchist circles came together to publicly express their rejection of the continued use of Sardinian land for military bases. Placards, flags and large banners helped to differentiate the various groups taking part in the march that set off from the parking lot in front of the 'Public Works Council'. Organizers and well-known activists denounced the regional government through a megaphone attached to a large sound system mounted on a red truck which blared a mix of hip hop, rock, Sardinian folk songs and reggae. Coloured smoke flares inaugurated the slow procession which passed grand villas and the entrances of luxury apartment buildings of Viale Luigi Merello eventually going through the streets of the much poorer 'popular' neighbourhoods of Is Mirrionis, until reaching the final destination, the occupied centre of Sa Domu (SD) within the fortified walls of the old quarter of the city. Despite the inherent violence behind the cause, namely the use of Sardinian land for military training and war simulation, it was a peaceful affair, a rare meeting of activists and friends from across the island who had united in solidarity against the devastating effects of the bases. Protestors dressed in white overalls that echoed the famous 'tute bianche'[86] graffitied and stuck posters on walls along the way. Walkers chanted 'A foras sa Nato de sa Sardigna', Sard for 'NATO out of Sardinia'. Women held the main banner which read: 'Togliamo le Basi alla Guerra', 'remove the bases of war' as a symbol of female activism and solidarity. The evening ended with food and performances by local musicians and DJs in the large courtyard overlooking the Western side of the city, its extensive saltworks, and the horizons of the Sulcis mountain range beyond which lay one of Sardinia's military bases, Teulada.

The crowd included a mix of both old and young activists or sympathizers, representatives of ProgRES, SN, LibeRU, SL, collectives such as the Anti-Military base network and the much respected A Foras assembly. A Foras, which in Sard translates to 'out', were a rare unifying force amongst independentists, anarchists, communists, consisting of an 'assembly' that organized the event in question as well as other protests and seminars with the aim of informing the public of the scope and severity of the issue. As we briefly saw previously, the military bases were often referenced by activists across parties including Lorenzo and Leonardo who both denounced the Italian state's use of Sardinian land for military training. For many activists, the military was a prime example of the little regard shown by regional and state government for the Sardinian population and a clear breach of Sardinian sovereignty.

A Foras also included activists such as Adriano who described himself as an 'independentist of sorts' and who was an active figure in the 'political laboratory' of SD which had been set up in 2014 following a student-led occupation of a disused school. Described by the tag 'feminismu, sotzialismu, indipendentzia' on its Facebook page, SD, regularly organized a range of public events and courses with the aim of establishing a permanent anti-fascist fixture at the heart of Cagliari and an alternative to existing political channels offered by the state. Central to their aims were issues related to race and gender equality, colonialism, self-determination, and the development of an approach to Sardinian independence that placed a class critique at the forefront of its aims. For Massimo, a respected figure in the anti-fascist socialist factions, these went hand-in-hand. ‘Capitalism’ was their ‘great nemesis’.

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[86] The overalls were significant as they not only enabled the protestors to hide their identity but because of their wider connotations with the Tute Bianche, protest movement that emerged in the 1990s against the closure of Left-wing anarchist autonomist social centres by the police. The movement drew from Zapatism and the works of thinkers such as Hardt and Negri and were famous for their publicity stunts. They became known internationally following violent clashes with police at the G8 summit in Genoa (Azzellini 2009).

Whilst SD was not explicitly an independentist movement and many would have seriously repudiated the label nationalist given the varied voices active within its circles that were committed to internationalist approaches that rejected any form of statism, it became evident, however, that it was the setting of a great deal of mobilization amongst anti-establishment factions of the island’s Left more generally. Events organized by SD were often widely shared by independentists on the Left, many of whom whilst opposed to the label nationalist, were nevertheless committed to the pursuit of Sardinian national self-determination. Support for the Kurdish struggle and Catalan independence was regularly expressed by people active in the initiatives and events organized by SD.

Activists like Adriano painted a very different picture of the struggle for Sardinian independence and the concept of sovereignty from people like Lorenzo and Leonardo. Sovereignty was regarded less as a signifier for the construction of a potentially hegemonizing collective will and more a term that encapsulated the kinds of approaches an emancipatory movement in Sardinia needed to steer away from. When asked about sovereignty and how he would define it, he said: ‘that word has been going around for maybe two or three years at the higher levels of Sardinian politics.’ He laughed while visibly cringing: ‘I say it’s one of those topics where I go “naaah, not sovereignty”’. For him sovereignty was an old-fashioned term that they, friends and fellow ‘comrades’, did not use because it had been ‘completely emptied of any meaning’. At the heart of his reservations was the ambiguity surrounding sovereignty’s signification which fluctuated depending on who could more effectively claim the position of sovereign. It ‘was a difficult word’ to ‘contextualize’, used by a mix of ‘regressive’ political forces including those who had directly contributed to Sardinia’s political and economic marginalization. He illustrated this fickleness with the ways in which states such as Italy claimed to represent an expression of popular sovereignty. In a somewhat exasperated tone, he noted: ‘Even the Italian constitution tells you about popular sovereignty! And all the other bourgeois constitutions tell you.’ He referenced article 1 of the Italian Constitution which states: ‘Italy is a democratic Republic founded on labour. Sovereignty belongs to the people who exercises it in the forms and within the limits of the Constitution’.

A particular source of dissatisfaction with the word, however, stemmed from its more recent association with emerging 'sovereigntist' parties in Italy such as the far-right Lega, CasaPound[87] and the Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia)[88] as well as the centrist politics of the PdS and Paolo Maninchedda. Adriano explained:

> 'It's used by all of the extreme right up to CasaPound. Berlusconi's right uses it […] It's a concept which in today's world has been distorted completely and we need to have our doubts about it. Perhaps it can in the future be redefined and re-given a meaning that could be effective […] but today as today, sovereigntism evokes the worst things for me. From the most moderate and complicit independentism we have in Sardinia, i.e. of Maninchedda and so on, to the most bigoted aspects of the Italian right'.

At the root of Adriano's dismissal of 'sovereignty' was its use by neo-fascist movements as well as the PdS and Maninchedda which in his view were no different from the 'classe compradora' i.e. the buying class, that had long dominated regional government and which were historically embroiled in the preservation of an elitist, clientelist politics opposed to Sardinian interests. Contrary to Lorenzo and Leonardo, Adriano maintained that sovereignty was synonymous with a 'politics of closure' that was partly to blame for the struggles that they were engaging with: increasing xenophobia, a population that did not value itself, and the survival of an elitist political class at the helm of regional politics:

> 'For me to talk about an effective sovereignty of the Sardinian people, it needs to mean that the people here have sovereignty. Not when a political class which however much says it is independentist is instead dependent on the bourgeoisie and is 'compradora' has it'.

This negative attitude towards the concept was also shared by Igor, a local artist with long-standing ties to A Foras who claimed that the term never had any real significance in Sardinia and critiqued the PdS for not being 'sovereigntists' never mind independentists:

> 'They are a party that has attempted and has managed to create a faction that could enter into government with unionists without having a solid base behind them. They managed to put together a bunch of councillors and not all of them necessarily independentists. Some of them are independentists. Others are like the mayor of Macomer who is in favour of energy speculation. Obviously, all of these situations have given way to a

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[87] CasaPound is a movement organized around a series of occupied social centres across the country. Named after the American poet and fascist sympathizer Ezra Pound the movement comprises self-defined fascists and advocates for strong anti-immigration policies, cultivation of Italian nationalism, exit from the EU and the fostering of 'stable' working conditions in response to job precarity and privatization. See: https://www.casapounditalia.org/il-programma/

[88] The Fratelli d'Italia is a right-wing party that defines itself as a 'movement' focused on 'principles of sovereignty, liberty, democracy, justice, social solidarity, merit and fiscal equity, inspired by a spiritual vision of life and the traditional national values, liberal an popular and the construction of a Europe of the Peoples'. Original available at: https://www.fratelli-italia.it/about-us/. The party supports stringent anti-immigration policies, is anti-Islam, in favour of lower taxes, and preservation of Italian national identity. See also https://www.fratelli-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PROGRAMMA_A4_REV2.pdf

> strong conflict within the independentist movement […] where you don't find independentists alongside you but on the other side!'

Igor here was making reference to the mayor of Macomer's plans to build a large incinerator in the town despite protests by doctors and members of the public concerned with the environmental impact it would have (Tola 2014; Loi 2014). The mayor had also been recently accused of exchanging favours for votes (Sardinia Post 2019). The running thread in Igor's description much like Adriano's was that parties like the PdS which frequently defined its position as being both 'independentist' and 'sovereigntist' (Tola 2013), reflected a desire to maintain official positions rather than pursue an approach that put the region's political structures into question. Rather than symbolizing a sense of openness, of new horizons, sovereignty was instead seen as the marker of a reformism within the independentist movement.

The central point of convergence amongst activists like Adriano and Igor was the idea that national self-determination was only realizable when combined with a rejection of clientelism, reformism and the usual avenues of political representation in local and regional government. The latter were treated as integral features of a broader state apparatus that was incompatible with Sardinian interests given its ties to logics of capitalist accumulation necessarily opposed to a 'national-popular' moment in Gramscian terms. Sovereignty was symptomatic of the 'myth' of the Italian state, which rather than serving to represent the views and interests of the country's subaltern communities, facilitated the expression of highly elitist discourses and forms of national belonging. Sovereignty represented transformism par excellence, synonymous with a political approach that was seen as the antithesis to the kinds of 'revolutionary' politics that independentists needed to engage in in order to seriously combat Sardinia's political *and* economic marginalization, specifically, one that did not separate political, cultural and national freedom from economic equality.

Again, in keeping with the distinctions made in Chapter 5, we see here a treatment of sovereignty as a political activity, but unlike Lorenzo and Leonardo's formulation, it was indicative of a 'neutralizing' practice that absorbed independentist contestation and aligned the latter with configurations of an already hegemonic bloc of regional and state forces. The very existence of parties such as the PdS and PSd'Az was reliant on the state, on the distant, and in Massimo's words, 'self-referential' nature of government and party politics. Moreover, sovereignty was an expression of the inherent partiality within the Italian state as a political configuration that due to its privileging of class inequalities was unable to offer Sardinians a means for a genuine unification of national and popular participation. Daniele, an activist who frequented similar circles and was also present at the A Foras protest summed it up a few months later: 'The Lega calls itself a populist party but it is anti-people.'

Interestingly, however, despite his critique of sovereignty, Adriano nevertheless recognized something of value in the rise of sovereigntism which signalled an appetite amongst the general population for an approach that sought to move away from the individualism promoted by the increased neoliberalisation of Italy and Europe. He explained:

> 'I don't undervalue that when sovereignty is spoken of particularly at Italian level […] it's because it's an indication of today's historical period in which nation states are seeking to reinforce themselves in opposition to powers that are far away from them. The fact that people are moved by this issue, even if in the most populist and wrong way, is nevertheless an important signal of the feeling people have that they don't matter anymore. They feel that everything is being decided at the most distant point possible that they just have to endure. So even if I don't accept the word, it's a sign of something'.

The turn to the far-right was symptomatic of an underlying crisis within Europe and Italy, a rejection of the effects of atomization and a political system that privileged the interests of a minority. What we were witnessing was a pervasive feeling of exclusion and worthlessness. The strength of SD, for Adriano, was that it was made up of people who appreciated and experienced these fractures:

> 'Other than emigrating, what we have always known is that we travel from one call-centre to another and the ways in which dynamics of international capitalism mixes with the old dynamics of Italian colonialism. We really know this, everyone in Sardinia knows'.

For Adriano what independentists were failing to appreciate was the unifying potential a widespread realization that the political and economic models currently in place were not working for the majority of people. A viable opposition needed to begin from the ground up, to build a cultural consensus and grassroots solidarity based on this class consciousness. The central objective for SD was to insert the independence cause in a historically effective way into the lives of Sardinians. Labels were ultimately unimportant in the process: 'if anything, they have been the biggest problem in independentism and politics on the left more generally':

> When Sa Domu was born they asked us "but is Sa Domu independentist?" Our thing was "we'll find out" […] What we used to say was that before labelling ourselves, before going forward and asking people to take a position: are you an independentist or not? Seeing as our independentism doesn't just mean signing a paper and saying "OK from here to there we have become independent", seeing as we're still people who want to profoundly change society, as a minimum we have to first think and create a foundation for that kind of society to exist.'
>
> […]

> In general, we were people who weren't defined as independentist but who were all in favour of self-determination, we all came from a communist tradition that insisted that this self-determination could only mean an effective government of the people and which discussed not only independence from Italy but dependence on a neoliberal economic system and thus, we found it difficult to give ourselves a label […]
>
> Ideally, I want sovereignty for the Sardinian people […] For me sovereignty of the Sardinian people is when we arrive at what I was saying earlier, when there is a socialist society in Sardinia'.

Such an approach entailed greater scepticism of the state and the cultivation of greater solidarity with Sardinia's precarious working classes. In order to do this, activists needed to get involved in a number of 'fights' such as the anti-militarist initiatives pursued by A Foras or the Coordination of Sardinian Committees which provided localized, regular points of discussion and activity across Sardinia against military base activity and large speculative investments pursued by industrial, construction and energy sectors that risked causing environmental damage and increasing land privatization and food poverty. These represented important avenues for the development of a grassroots movement that could help break through normal political barriers amongst a population that was wary of politicians and government bodies and which could also pressure local councils. Moreover, they exercised an educational role, disseminating important information through flyers, dossiers,[89] seminars, presentations and talks.

Other notable initiatives according to Adriano, included the Circolo Me-Ti a 'political circle' (Lobina 2014) organized by members of the Communist Refoundation Party, independentists with no specific affiliation and others which ran from a small office called Bixinau in Is Mirrionis and San Michele, two of the poorest neighbourhoods in Cagliari. The office offered employment, legal and health advice, study support for students, and arranged an array of events such as book presentations, discussions on Sardinian development and educational programmes such as the Lingua Bia Sard courses available to both native and non-native speakers.

Stefano an active member of Circolo Me-Ti and self-defined independentist, explained to me in a separate interview that these smaller groups were a means through which they could build networks with Sardinia's workers, migrants, the left, playing an important organizational role in the furthering of a politics that prized popular participation and recognition. Crucially, it was an approach that contrasted with the 'abstract' nature of the independentism of larger parties which hadn't 'managed to be a movement of the masses' and had struggled to adequately

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[89] Examples of these can be found on the A Foras website at: https://aforas.noblogs.org/materiali/

‘communicate’ with the public, to ‘speak to people’s guts’. What they didn’t understand was that they were not going to get anywhere by asking someone in Is Mirrionis, ‘are you an independentist?’ The fight for Sardinian independence was in his view an ‘anthropological revolution’ that would take years to develop and was ‘something independentists needed to live’, to enact. Unlike the Catalan movement which had gradually infiltrated into the community, in Sardinia a similar work had not yet taken place. Many Sardinians believed that ‘Italy has good things, has allowed us to enter into the world, have given us the most beautiful language in the world’. ‘The main political problem is that Sardinian politics is done with our heads in Rome’. In a similar vein Adriano explained:

> ‘We’re in a historical phase in which we need to start from the fights, we need to regain the trust of the people through practised action, we need to call for what has been taken from us, and try to put forward a political discourse which is perhaps a bit conflictual but which doesn’t fall into the general wave in which political action was falling into.’
>
> ‘Those of us that were youngest and had a chance to witness dynamics within the movement insisted on working in Cagliari in spaces in the city with the involvement of youth collectives, on the development of struggles in our territory and so create legitimacy for us and above all practice, grow, begin to understand where we were beginning to head in the world beyond the usual schemes, theories and directions in which our various political experiences had always gone.’

We find in these accounts a shared preoccupation with developing an approach that could mobilize Sardinian people, elicit recognition and a sense of belonging. The emphasis here was on encouraging trust and commitment and in developing it alongside Sardinian communities in order to reverse the deeply embedded acceptance of Italy’s supremacy. We find a similar concern with the question of how Sardinians feel and an awareness of the extent to which Italy enjoyed a hegemonic status in public. The fight to self-determination entailed a cultural work, the production of new social relations, blocs, ideologies and discourses, which were only possible through a grassroots movement shaped by the quotidian experiences of those they wanted to represent.

As suggested in Chapter 5, there was a great deal of overlap in activist accounts. Others on the Left such as Robert from the RM, and Gabriele, member of the PA coalition, and Giorgia from PA, similarly placed weight on the anti-militarist struggle on a cultural work for the ‘hearts of Sardinians’ (Giorgia), on the rejection of approaches advanced by the likes of the PdS and PSd’Az, whilst holding a more gradualist approach to the issue of sovereignty. Although Roberto liked the RM’s original formulation of the term (see p. 120), he also recognized the negative connotations it had acquired following the rise of the far-right in Italy at the time.

Giorgia, took a different stance, arguing that sovereignty was a term used by parties who 'were not really independentists'.

Attitudes towards sovereignty were thus very mixed. What these varied readings nevertheless did indicate, much like all of the accounts here described was that what was at stake in discussions around sovereignty's rejection and or use was the familiar issue of what independentism could feasibly entail. In the words of Roberto:

> 'How do we become independent? In a progressive way through gradients? Or making a jump? How do we acquire these gradients? Through the acquisition of progressive competences that become wider and through exploiting the Statute? Or with armed struggle? The majority of independence has been obtained through armed struggle including Italy's. The Risorgimento was an armed struggle. Or through a referendum? An authorized or non-authorized referendum? What are the mechanisms in place in the Italian constitution through which we can have a referendum for independence? There are none. How many years will it take for us to obtain independence? Scotland for example planned this out very well. When they agreed with the English government to have a referendum they spent 5 years going from house to house explaining what their independence project meant, how they would have managed finances, immigration, the pound, oil resources, universities, health, things which we have currently have control over […] We don't have a high level project […] there has never been planning, i.e. a lucid and realistic project for independence'.

For Roberto, and for all activists here discussed, there was much to be done with regards to not only transforming the highly dependent relationship Sardinians had on the peninsula, but also in the accompanying discourses shaping how the majority of Sardinians felt about themselves. The attainment of Sardinian independence could only be achieved when there was a congruence between activists' claims and widespread attitudes and in the pursuit of what Paolo, another critic of sovereignty with close links to ProgRES described as 'microscopic work', the 'creation of a consensus that doesn't revolve around a party: a long-term consensus'.

7.5 Concluding Thoughts

The accounts here described once again point to the ways in which activists understood sovereignty in dialectical terms as intricately related to the world around them. How they used sovereignty and interpreted what it entailed responded to concerns that were economic, political, cultural, national and international in kind and which did not treat these as separable concerns but mutually reinforcing. In the case of those favourable to the term's use, sovereignty represented a means through which they could create convincing national myths that could both expand the independence project and mobilize in accordance with existing political and economic infrastructures within and outside the Italian state. For those critical of the concept and those who used it, sovereignty was symbolic of a transformist kind of politics and the contradictions and limits of the capitalist state form that was unable to deliver the inclusive and emancipatory form of politics they felt was necessary in order to combat long standing issues tied to clientelism and class inequality.

What the accounts here examined also indicate is that despite the clear differences between activists in the ways they initially defined sovereignty as seen in Chapter 5, there was also a great deal of convergence in their accounts when it came to how they interpreted what doing sovereignty actually entailed. In the cases of Lorenzo and Leonardo for instance, while the former was very clear about sovereignty referring to a juridical ideal, when he expanded on what he envisioned the attainment of sovereignty meaning, we see some notable similarities with the accounts of activists like Lorenzo who was acutely concerned with the development of an expansionist project that could not only create an inclusive popular expression of demands but also extend the horizons of the terms around Sardinia's participation and recognition at an international scale. We find in these accounts what in Gramscian terms can be understood as not only a process in myth-making but an attempt to create a hegemonizing project that could embed a Sardinian national will within existing political and economic relations and thus find an organic correspondence between them.

Moreover, we also find consensus around the limits of legitimate and credible political practice in which the state exerts a significant influence over attitudes towards the basis of manoeuvre as a central facilitator/inhibitor. For Leonardo and Lorenzo, statehood and a capitalist framework of economic exchange and organization were unquestioned, naturalized as basic features of the current order of things and the materialization of a Sardinian sovereign will. The state, the nation, the international and the lines seen to separate them were both rigid, a fact or reality of life and political praxis, and contingent, a reflection of the historical nature of these distinctions as the product of actions and interests, made and unmade. There was an implicit acceptance of a broader way of doing things, particularly evident in their economic demands and the adoption of a liberal framework which was seen as being a necessary factor in the manifestation of Sardinian national independence.

Even amongst sovereignty's critics, we find a similar appreciation of the influence of such notions of political possibility and the hegemonic nature of statist imaginaries. Gramsci's idea of 'abnormal hegemony' to characterize the passive and highly incomplete nature of the Risorgimento is perhaps better placed to describe the kinds of significance activists like Adriano attached to the state. The latter in these accounts was not some amorphous body but a reflection of the primacy of the interests of a political class intimately interconnected with the logics of capitalist exchange and accumulation. This was evidenced in the transformist approaches adopted by the region's political representatives and the existence of a reformist wing within the movement that was focused on the preservation of their position as opposed to the construction of a genuinely democratic politics that placed issues of class and inequality at the forefront of their aims. Where activists favouring sovereignty saw the possibilities for the creation of a national-popular will capable of evening this unevenness out, those rejecting the term saw its perpetuation.

There were also some striking similarities in the ways in which activists spoke about the kinds of approaches they needed to adopt. The reclaiming of a Sardinian community was important for all respondents, most of whom accepted the idea that an organic and deep-rooted sense of collective responsibility and unity had been lost or was otherwise unexpressed. Desires for a unifying relationship with Sardinians embedded in how they felt and understood the world around them was evident in everyone's account. Crucially, there was recognition that the power of existing social relations lay not only in the political and economic structures shaping them but in people's conceptions of the world, in a common sense understanding of Sardinia's place within the Italian state and a broader political and economic system within which the Italian State was necessarily placed. In line with the accounts considered in Chapter 6, what we also find in all of the accounts here described is a widespread concern with the development of forms of political manoeuvre that could navigate existing conditions of possibility.

In many ways these contrasting approaches pointed to the manifestation of class antagonisms within the movement, symbolizing dividing lines between those who tied sovereignty to the fractures of the capitalist state and those who saw in sovereignty a more emancipatory path through which they could facilitate the expression and pursuit of Sardinian interests. These differing framings aligned with the different positions activists held within the movement and their relationship with regional government. Those favourable towards sovereignty tended to have a longer history in regional and local office, constituting a part of long-standing bloc of political forces that have dominated regional and local government. Critics often quite deliberately occupied more 'peripheral' positions even if many occupied. Within these optics, sovereignty marked an impasse around a politics of reformation and revolution, representing a hegemonizing and mythologizing activity and/or a container of the oxymoronic nature of the Italian state's claims to represent national and popular demands. Moreover, its ambiguities, its reflection of and/or formulations emerged not from a rejection of absolutism per se but from the material context within which sovereignty functioned and the active and passive nature of state hegemony manifest not only in the economy and government but in a limited hold on the minds and ‘hearts’ of Sardinian people. Indeed, what we find in these accounts is an understanding of sovereignty not purely as abstract ideal, even if critics lamented its ambiguities, but as something that activists made sense of in, to borrow from Andrea, the ‘materiality of their own lives’, constructed and understood in ways that were inseparable from the very experiences of being and feeling Sardinian.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

> ‘Whatever avenues are now being opened up in the exploration of contemporary political identities, whether in the name of nations, humanities, classes, races, cultures, genders or movements, they remain largely constrained by ontological and discursive options expressed most elegantly, and to the modern imagination most persuasively, by claims about the formal sovereignty of territorial states. As both principle and practice, as an expression of a specifically modern articulation of political identity in space and time, state sovereignty is something we can neither simply affirm, nor renounce, nor gaze upon in silent admiration’ (Walker 1993: 162).

Walker’s observation made almost 30 years ago in his now seminal critique of realist notions of sovereignty still resonates with us today. This thesis, motivated by a similar spirit, namely, a desire to not renounce sovereignty nor gaze upon it in silent admiration, has shown that sovereignty does indeed continue to matter amongst Sardinian activists as a form of *doing* that is deeply entrenched in widespread notions of recognition, legitimacy and credibility, in the creation and experience of collective action. This spirit also extends to an engagement with nationalism itself, which in ways not dissimilar to sovereignty, also merits greater engagement as something we cannot simply affirm nor renounce but which constitutes an integral feature of the ways in which many continue to engage with the political, its limits and uneven terrain.

Responding to a pervasive lacuna in research in IR on nationalism, in particular minority nationalisms, as well as the contributions made by emerging scholarship that has drawn attention to the complex ways in which minority nationalists interpret sovereignty, the primary aim of this thesis has been to draw attention to the ways in which Sardinian independentists defined sovereignty and the extent to which they conformed to or problematized realist framings of the term. In order to address this overarching objective, it has focused on answering the following research questions:

1. How do Sardinian independentists define and use sovereignty?
2. What significance do Sardinian independentists attach to sovereignty within their claims for national self-determination?
3. What do their accounts of sovereignty tell us about the conditions shaping minority nationalist mobilization?

Through an examination of interviews conducted with activists and fieldnotes, this research has shown that activists frequently questioned sovereignty’s continued resonance, adhering to highly complex and nuanced treatments of the term that often had less to do with the delimitation of state control and boundedness and more with the formulation of demands and strategies that reflected a relational understanding of discursive selection and which pointed to an acute sensibility to the limits of sovereign power within contemporary world politics. Whilst activists often alluded to conventional readings of sovereignty tied to logics of state governance and legitimacy, minority nationalists in Sardinia actively questioned absolutist formulations. Central to many of the accounts here examined was the ascription to an and/or logic of signification that did not regard sovereignty as a clear marker of absolute power or neat political and territorial boundaries. Sovereignty represented a much more fluid notion that reflected forms of political mobilization that directly problematized the rigid lines between intra-interstate, seen for example in approaches to sovereignty as something that was graduated or in formulations that regarded Sardinia's insertion within a global market and an international system of states as crucial requisites in the manifestation of national self-determination, or in the widespread appreciation of differing framings of the concept. Many of sovereignty's critics for instance, did not reject the term out-right, rather dismissing it on the basis of its usage by antagonistic forces within the movement and Italian state more broadly. Sovereignty could entail several things at the same time and could be co-opted or used in differing ways.

Crucially, in keeping with the Gramscian approach adopted, activists' questioning of binary treatments of sovereignty was closely tied to the perceived fractures of existing social relations, often reflecting an amalgamation of concerns that problematized the nature of national recognition and participation within existing conditions of world ordering. Activist demands were influenced by issues around international and national credibility, political and economic manoeuvre, and the uneven legacies of Italian unification and capitalist development in Sardinia. These concerns informed their approaches to sovereignty which with a few exceptions, was not regarded as a static form but as having the capacity to shift in meaning in response to existing conditions shaping political possibility.

Sovereignty was dialectically formed, something that was especially marked when understood in relation to activists' concerns with credibility and a politics of situated rupture. The frequent insistence on the need to pursue a politics that could produce transformation within the contours of existing social conditions, stressed the relational understanding they had around the national question which was as much about Sardinia's cultural and national recognition as it was a rejection of the corruption of Italian economic and political elites and the stifled nature of Italy's national-popular moment. Moreover, their descriptions of the conditions for political manoeuvre pointed to a pervasive understanding of the roots of the Sardinian national struggle. Activists from across the movement pointed to a range of shared concerns: continued economic deprivation, the colonial exploitation of Sardinian land, disconnection from an international market restricted by the state, clientelism, limited hegemony amongst a disaffected population. In Gramscian terms, these indicated the continuation of the passive nature of Italian unification and a failure to adequately respond to its uneven legacies, serving instead to perpetuate and in some cases aggravate already existing class and regional inequalities.

Sovereignty was thus as much about opening up new opportunities as it was about practicable politics. This duality of purpose was evident in the different political praxes adopted by activists and the relationships they posited with the state. Activists seemed torn between the adoption of reformative forms of political action that reflected the continued abnormal hegemony of political and economic elites in the region and beyond, and a revolutionary approach that emphasized ruptures with things as they were. There was significant variation around what this rupture entailed as a shift in locus of power or a dismantling of the very foundations of the capitalist state or somewhere-in-between. Significantly, this variation seemed to influence their treatments of sovereignty as a form of doing which broadly aligned with forms of myth-making both in the sense of developing a hegemonizing national will and in terms of reformist forms of political action associated with a failed Italian national project.

Struggles over sovereignty's signification and use indicated the influence of accepted forms of political mobilization and the merging of class interests that were not exclusive to Sardinia but reflective of an Italian bloc shaped by the logics of interstate cooperation and capitalist accumulation. Whilst statist imaginaries of power continued to underpin many of the accounts here considered, activists were quick to point to the capillary extensions of both nation and state, as not self-contained but intricately interwoven into global configurations of social relations that buttressed possibilities for contestation and manoeuvre. The state represented a container of sorts through which they could mobilize and within which they simultaneously felt restricted to act. The struggle for Sardinian national sovereignty, however, was not one waged solely against Italian elites but also against a much broader context of recognition and participation within which Sardinia was rendered a marginal or excluded voice. This was visible in the accounts of activists desirous of the adoption of neoliberal policies of deregulation *and* in the accounts of those more critical of sovereignty who regarded it as indicative of a restrictive form of politics.

8.1 Research Implications and Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to a number of academic discussions, in particular to critical IR and IPE scholarship which has been at the forefront of attempts to push the boundaries of the realist common sense that once dominated treatments of world politics. Specifically, the research contributes to dispelling pervasive treatments of nationalisms as necessarily tied to binary and exclusionary notions of power. As I suggested in Part 1 of this thesis, such treatments produce highly reductionist readings of nationalisms that remove agency from those seeking national independence and also undermine the continued significance of nationalism and the broad array of political objectives pursued under claims for self-determination.

This research shows that whilst activists often alluded to conventional readings of sovereignty tied to logics of state governance and legitimacy, they were also acutely aware of the difficulties in defining it, treating it as a partialized and highly ambiguous concept. As the Sardinian case shows, activists eager to pursue national independence frequently questioned the concept and the conditions for its realizability and expressed concern over exclusionary forms of nationalist mobilization. Moreover, what it also shows is that far from homogeneous, nationalisms reflect ongoing struggles between activists who often share very different aims around the basis and direction of the cause in question. These findings understood in conjunction with the flexible approach activists adopted towards the concept of sovereignty aligns with other analyses of European minority nationalist framings that evince much more strategic approaches to what sovereignty in practice entails (Dalle Mulle & Serrano 2019; Lluch 2014), reflecting the partiality activists themselves ascribed to the term.

The findings also show that sovereignty should not be regarded as mere reification or abstraction as is often seen in critical approaches that regard sovereignty as an abstracting means through which the contradictions of the modern capitalist state are obscured (Rosenberg 1994). Rather the study of sovereignty should also be accompanied by closer analysis of its use, as a practice and an idea that is constructed and mediated within the context of people's daily lives. By overlooking the socially embedded ways in which the concept is understood, we risk overlooking important nuances surrounding sovereignty's signification and thus perpetuating reified depictions of claims for national sovereignty. Indeed, whilst concerns over the term as a reifying ideal was certainly relevant to the Sardinian case as voiced by its critics, this did not account for the scope of meanings attached to the term nor the ways in which sovereignty was intricately interwoven into the particularities of the Sardinian case and an array of concerns that cannot be accounted for when sovereignty is treated as abstraction.

Secondly and relatedly, the research also emphasizes the need to devote greater attention to the development of dialectical readings of sovereignty as something that is historically bound to ideologies and discourses of what politics is or should be and inextricably linked to the relations of production and the material conditions within which those claims are made.

Specifically, this entails the adoption of analyses that do not discard the significance of capitalism as a fundamental structuring feature of contemporary formulations of sovereignty and nationalism. As the current analysis shows, when discussing sovereignty, activists did not categorize the term in accordance with neat lines between economic and political domains. The doing of sovereignty was inextricably linked to the fusion of structural *and* superstructural concerns that indicated an understanding of the world in which the economic and political basis of sovereignty were inseparable factors. Capital's limiting nature both within and beyond the state in the way of a global 'market' and the maintenance of a regional 'classe compradora', indicated the existence of a hegemonic ordering, a way of life and of doing politics to which activists felt necessarily bound. This did not mean that they accepted these conditions but indicated what Davidson borrowing from Gramsci describes as the 'dual' or 'contradictory' nature of political consciousness at the heart of attempts to enact change which 'on the one hand [accepts] the permanence of the system, on the other [rejects] the effect of its operation' (Davidson 2016: 69). Activists seemed to be grappling with the continuous tension between a politics of revolution and restoration/reformation, which was not only reflective of the limits of political possibility within the state itself but which in many ways felt more hopeless or energizing than this (depending on who you spoke to), and referred to a broader structuring distribution of capitalist relations that both filtered through into Sardinia, but which remained simultaneously detached and far-removed from the needs of Sardinian people.

The implications of this are significant. On one level, it echoes calls to interpret capitalism as being internally related to international relations, to the categories we attribute to its organization and the horizons of possible political manoeuvre (Bieler & Morton 2018a). On a second level, it also points to *nationalism's* necessary embeddedness within the fractured and uneven terrain of capitalism's influence in world politics and as such, international relations both in the sense of discipline and world ordering. As Davidson sagely reminds us, 'nationalism should not be seen as something that only "happens" during separatist movements on the one hand; or during Fascist and imperialist manifestations on the other: the capitalist system generates nationalism as a necessary, everyday condition of its continued existence' (Davidson 2016: 71), both as a reformist, absorbing project seen for instance in the nationalism that characterized the Risorgimento, but also as a means of contestation and transformation. Scepticism and a healthy awareness of nationalism's embroilment in politics of exclusion is important, however, we also need to be more cautious in our assessments of what nationalism means for people, reflective as they are of important structuring factors shaping collective mobilization today. Nationalism should not be treated as an 'independent variable' (Davidson 2016: 66) but rather a crucial component in the story of the international's standing.

I am inclined to agree with Davidson when he states that nationalism in many ways provides a 'need for some collective sense of belonging with which to overcome the effects of alienation, the need for psychic compensation for the injuries sustained at the hands of capitalist society […] in the absence of revolutionary class consciousness but in conjunction with reformist class consciousness' (Davidson 2016: 74). Where I would disagree, is with the idea that nationalism inherently entails the perpetuation of things as they are. As activist problematizations of sovereignty and attempts to push for self-determination and collective belonging show, we also find kernels of desires for a revolutionary moment beyond the realm of the state. What we see in the sovereignty demands here explored, is a highly complex story around the nature of sovereignty's and/or which not only reflects diversity of subjectivities and experiences but in many ways emerge from the contingencies of the historical limits surrounding what activists can credibly do, what Gill describes as the 'limits of the possible' (Gill 2008: 13), and the traces of a long history of struggle around the basis of the political, of life and their production.

Capital's role in this story is more often than not underemphasized in literature on minority nationalisms which whilst often acknowledging the significance of capitalist development and of class in the formation of minority nationalist claims, often treats the economy as an independent variable, separable from activist approaches to nationalist strategies and conceptualizations of the nation (Keating 2014a). What the research suggests is that such clear divides cannot be sustained even if there are undoubtedly great variations in the contributing factors behind minority nationalist mobilization as well as dangers in overemphasizing economic concerns over the cultural dimensions characteristic of nationalist discourse and identity. There is much to be gained in a renewed appreciation of the manifestation of relations of production, in the state as a 'nodal point' (Morton 2007a: 101) within the messiness and violence of capitalism's influence, and the inherent limitations of the national-popular moment. In Sardinia, these issues are not secondary considerations but passionately experienced through the perpetuation of class inequalities, precarity, unemployment, regional cleavages, clientelism, linguistic and cultural oppression, and a political elite that is far-removed.

Finally, the research provides a much-needed update to current discussions of Sardinian nationalism which with the exception of a few cases (Clifton & Usai 2019; Demuro, Mola & Ruggiu 2013; Farinelli 2017; Hepburn 2009b; Pala 2016), continues to be seriously overlooked.

The fieldwork data collected provides us with unique insights into attitudes amongst independentists in addition to ongoing developments in approaches to sovereignty. It is hoped that the information here supplied will also be of interest to activists themselves, some of whom lamented the scarcity of research on the movement and who were extremely enthusiastic about the project. To them, the research seeks to serve as a synthesis of perceived challenges facing mobilization, points of agreement as well as avenues for potential action and which speaks loudly to long-standing experiences of isolation, exploitation and indifference often forgotten.

8.2 Areas for Further Study

As an exercise in interrogating oversights and strengthening lines of inquiry, the conducting of research inevitably opens up new questions. I suspect that I am not alone in having found the experience of conducting fieldwork extremely rewarding, providing rich and surprising insights into the world I was trying to understand and convey, as well as opening an extensive array of avenues for further research. Indeed, my time in Sardinia unveiled unforeseen issues around the topic at hand and I often felt that the information I accessed in Sardinia represented the tip of the iceberg when it came to the extensive scope of challenges, daily struggles taking place in the fight for Sardinian independence such as the issue of the military bases which distilled some of the tensions within the Italian state frequently discussed by activists. The present study, driven by a desire to bring *activist* accounts of sovereignty to the fore, provides a useful grounding for further research into Sardinian nationalism which could be bolstered through an analysis of Sardinia's political economy and the nature of the social relations of production shaping its place within Italy and Europe. Greater expansion on the topic could help unpack important structural peculiarities of the minority nationalisms gaining traction in Europe, and their fraught relationship with states and capitalist development. The research also highlights the potential of a Gramscian approach to the study of nationalisms and minority nationalisms more generally, as a perspective that considers them not as isolated movements detached from the material conditions defining political horizons but integral features of world politics and the narratives that have accompanied the formation of states and interstate politics. Study and comparison with non-European cases would be instructive in this respect, enabling an exploration of the diversity of forces giving shape to minority nationalism and sovereignty's doing.

To end, a final word from our Sardinian interlocutor, Antonio Gramsci, who in an article published in *Avanti!* in 1919 entitled 'Our Sardinian Brothers' commented on the exchange between Turin workers and the Sassari Brigade who had been called in to control protests noted the revolutionary potential of the interaction:

> ‘Rapidly, with the proper intuition of straight and honest consciousness, the Sardinians found their way around the Turin industrial space and felt that their solidarity, their affection as brothers had to go to the working class, to the workers who struggle to free the working people from the exploitation of the capitalists, who therefore also struggle to free Sardinia from the vultures of international capitalism that exploit its mines, railways, agricultural production and pastoralism’ (own translation Melis 1975: 101)[90]

Implicit in these words written over a century ago was an important idea; namely, that Sardinian experiences matter and that Sardinian self-determination matters.

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[90] Original: ‘Rapidamente, con l’intuizione propria delle coscienze diritte e oneste, i sardi si sono orizzontati nell’ambiente industriale torinese e hanno sentito che la loro solidarietà, il loro affetto di fratelli doveva andare alla classe lavoratrice, agli operai che lottano per liberare il popolo lavoratore dallo sfruttamento dei capitalisti, che lottano quindi anche per liberare la Sardegna dagli avvoltoi del capitalismo internazionale che ne sfruttano le miniere, le ferrovie, la produzione agricola e pastorizia’.

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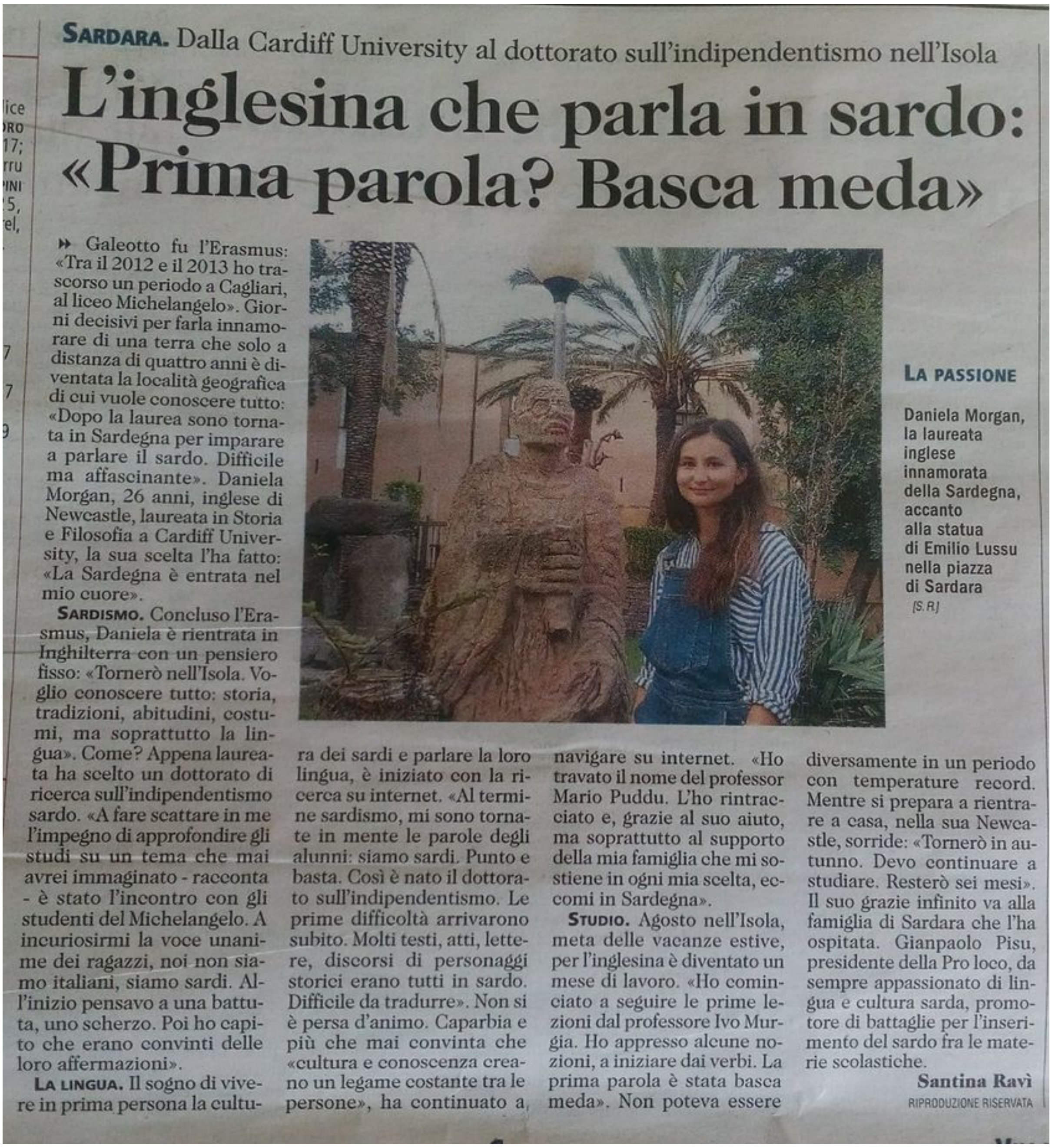
Appendices

Appendix A: Interviews

Name (original names changed)	Party/affiliation	Type of Interview	Date
1. Leonardo	PdS	Semi-structured Recorded	26/08/17
2. Giancarlo	SNI	Semi-structured Recorded	27/08/17
3. Lorenzo	PSd'Az	Semi-structured Recorded	07/09/17
4. Marco	ProgRES	Semi-structured Telephone	13/09/17
5. Gabriele	PA	Semi-structured Recorded	21/09/17
6. Davide	PA	Semi-structured Notes	01/12/17
7. Francesco	ProgRES	Semi-structured Notes	06/12/17
8. Giuseppe	Unaffiliated	Semi-structured Recorded	12/12/17
9. Angelo	CN	Semi-structured Telephone	18/12/17
10. Antonello	MZF	Semi-structured Recorded	15/01/18
11. Rosa	MZF	Semi-structured Notes	15/01/18
12. Salvatore	Unaffiliated	Semi-structured Recorded	16/01/18
13. Matteo	Unaffiliated	Semi-structured Notes	30/01/18
14. Michele	Unidos	Semi-structured Notes	01/02/18
15. Antonio	ProgRES	Semi-structured Notes	02/02/18
16. Paolo	Unaffiliated	Semi-structured Telephone	15/02/18
17. Alessandro	PA	Semi-structured Recorded	07/03/18
18. Vicenzo	Unaffiliated	Semi-structured Recorded	10/03/18
19. A Foras Activists	AF	Semi-structured Notes	15/04/18
20. Roberto	RM	Semi-structured Recorded	21/04/18
21. Emilio	PSd'Az	Semi-structured Recorded	24/04/18
22. Andrea	Circolo MeTi	Semi-structured Recorded	29/04/18

23. Sergio	Unaffiliated	Semi-structured Recorded	02/05/18
24. Domenico	PA	Semi-structured Notes	13/05/18
25. Igor	AF	Semi-structured Recorded	15/05/18
26. Lucia	SL	Semi-structured Recorded	16/05/18
27. Federico	ProgRES	Semi-structured Recorded	17/05/18
28. Laura and Giulia	PA	Semi-structured Notes	23/05/18
29. Giorgia	LibeRU	Semi-structured Notes	30/05/18
30. Massimo	Unaffiliated	Semi-structured Recorded	05/06/18
31. Francesca	IRS	Semi-structured Recorded	07/06/18
32. Adriano	SD	Semi-structured Recorded	12/06/18
33. Stefano	Circolo MeTi	Semi-structured Recorded	12/06/18
34. Daniele	Circolo MeTi	Semi-structured Recorded	19/06/18
35. Luca	Unaffiliated	Semi-structured Telephone	20/06/18
36. Riccardo	ProgRES	Semi-structured Recorded	21/06/18
37. Mario	CSS	Semi-structured Telephone	25/06/18

Appendix B: Unione Sarda Article



SARDARA. Dalla Cardiff University al dottorato sull'indipendentismo nell'Isola

L'inglesina che parla in sardo: «Prima parola? Basca meda»

Galeotto fu l'Erasmus: «Tra il 2012 e il 2013 ho trascorso un periodo a Cagliari, al liceo Michelangelo». Giorni decisivi per farla innamorare di una terra che solo a distanza di quattro anni è diventata la località geografica di cui vuole conoscere tutto: «Dopo la laurea sono tornata in Sardegna per imparare a parlare il sardo. Difficile ma affascinante». Daniela Morgan, 26 anni, inglese di Newcastle, laureata in Storia e Filosofia a Cardiff University, la sua scelta l'ha fatto: «La Sardegna è entrata nel mio cuore».

SARDISMO. Concluso l'Erasmus, Daniela è rientrata in Inghilterra con un pensiero fisso: «Tornerò nell'Isola. Voglio conoscere tutto: storia, tradizioni, abitudini, costumi, ma soprattutto la lingua». Come? Appena laureata ha scelto un dottorato di ricerca sull'indipendentismo sardo. «A fare scattare in me l'impegno di approfondire gli studi su un tema che mai avrei immaginato - racconta - è stato l'incontro con gli studenti del Michelangelo. A incuriosirmi la voce unanime dei ragazzi, noi non siamo italiani, siamo sardi. All'inizio pensavo a una battuta, uno scherzo. Poi ho capito che erano convinti delle loro affermazioni».

LA LINGUA. Il sogno di vivere in prima persona la cultura dei sardi e parlare la loro lingua, è iniziato con la ricerca su internet. «Al termine sardismo, mi sono tornate in mente le parole degli alunni: siamo sardi. Punto e basta. Così è nato il dottorato sull'indipendentismo. Le prime difficoltà arrivarono subito. Molti testi, atti, lettere, discorsi di personaggi storici erano tutti in sardo. Difficile da tradurre». Non si è persa d'animo. Caparbia e più che mai convinta che «cultura e conoscenza creano un legame costante tra le persone», ha continuato a navigare su internet. «Ho travato il nome del professor Mario Puddu. L'ho rintracciato e, grazie al suo aiuto, ma soprattutto al supporto della mia famiglia che mi sostiene in ogni mia scelta, eccomi in Sardegna».

STUDIO. Agosto nell'Isola, meta delle vacanze estive, per l'inglesina è diventato un mese di lavoro. «Ho cominciato a seguire le prime lezioni dal professore Ivo Murgia. Ho appresso alcune nozioni, a iniziare dai verbi. La prima parola è stata basca meda». Non poteva essere diversamente in un periodo con temperature record. Mentre si prepara a rientrare a casa, nella sua Newcastle, sorride: «Tornerò in autunno. Devo continuare a studiare. Resterò sei mesi». Il suo grazie infinito va alla famiglia di Sardara che l'ha ospitata. Gianpaolo Pisu, presidente della Pro loco, da sempre appassionato di lingua e cultura sarda, promotore di battaglie per l'inserimento del sardo fra le materie scolastiche.

Santina Ravì

RIPRODUZIONE RISERVATA

LA PASSIONE

Daniela Morgan, la laureata inglese innamorata della Sardegna, accanto alla statua di Emilio Lussu nella piazza di Sardara

[S.R]