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Ethnicism and (green) extractivism in contemporary Sulcis

A study through the lenses of citizenship and activism

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Abstract: The decarbonization policies of the European Green Deal highlight central political tensions, such as the labor/environment opposition. Local protests against these policies often stem from political dynamics tied to specific territories and the politicization of new spheres of experience. This article focuses on such opposition in Sardinia's Sulcis Iglesiente region, particularly the island of San Pietro, by examining the interplay of local, national, and continental factors. It argues that distrust and dispossession expressed by social groups arise from exclusion from political resources, lack of control over land, sea, and labor. The article explores the terms that islanders use to express these feelings and what these expressions tell us about local experiences of citizenship. It asks whether the local mobilization of ethnicisms by various actors can be interpreted as a tool – both regressive and emancipatory – for regaining control. The article endeavors to extract from its context a specific conception of the political dimension and to capture the ethnographically derived meaning of local political categories. Face to extractive logics and social fragmentation imposed by broader processes, it is worth questioning whether and in what terms precisely political subjectivities can (or cannot) arise in this micro-context, and whether (energy) citizenship experiments can be likened to self-instituting processes with a basis other than the logic of profit and speculation.

Keywords: green transitions, participation, citizenship, subjectivation processes, dispossessions, wind farms.

European climate change mitigation and adaptation policies, and particularly the European Union's (EU's) agenda for decarbonization at the heart of the European Green Deal, are facing many challenges, including local opposition, especially in coal- and carbon-intensive regions. The political and identity-based nature of such opposition challenges anthropology to understand a phenomenon that concerns Europe and beyond, hybridizing with socio-political mechanisms often classified as populist or anti-élite, or giving rise to a conflict between work and the environment, landscape conservation and new ecological imaginaries. It is unclear whether the ecological transition really represents a horizon of possible change for communities, or whether it is instead experienced as an imposition of development models from outside that could be interpreted as a failure from the local communities' point of view. The real implications of the term "transition" can obviously be depoliticized by minimizing the unrest and conflict caused by uncertainty[1].

As Heatherington's (2010) pivotal work shows, Sardinia can be a particularly interesting location for fieldwork aiming to analyse the tension between living cultural landscapes and the emerging environmentalist imaginaries proposed by political discourses (Meloni 2021; Cossu, 2022). Here I examine local phenomena in Sulcis, and in Carloforte, San Pietro Island, in particular, that seem to be connected with the cultural consequences of decades-long dispossessions (Heatherington 2010; Murray Li 2010; West 2016) tied to the loss of industrial citizenship (Strangleman 2015) and linked to the exclusion of local communities from decision-making processes and planning and control mechanisms over production processes. I hypothesize that this loss influenced the possibility of thinking politically and acting collectively, affecting – among others – the possibilities of mobilization from below. Along with the lack of a protest movement against the serious social and environmental consequences of the presence of the Portovesme coal-fired industrial plants, we observe the emergence of a local (municipal-scale) protest movement against the installation of offshore wind farms decided on by the Italian government (within the *RePower Europe* framework), a mega-project pivotal to the regional and national energy transition strategy. This latter bottom-up protest movement has grown in recent years, and is partly supported by local institutions.

I hypothesize that feelings of distrust and dispossession expressed by different social groups that compose the community are related to exclusion

1. I would like to sincerely thank the reviewers, whose comments significantly contributed to this article.

from political resources, such as mechanisms of control over the land (and the sea) and labour, and locally claimed exposure to environmental risks[2]. I try to explore the terms islanders use to express these feelings, and what these expressions tell us about local experiences of citizenship. In this context, I wonder if local ethnicism – an emphasis on ethnic identity – may be interpreted as a tool, both regressive and emancipatory, for regaining control.

Since 1900, crucial decisions about this sulcitanian territory, its material wealth (minerals, mainly) and its labour force have mostly been made elsewhere, through industrial policies that are both blessed and cursed by the local population. Coal and lead-zinc mining took shape during the fascist autarkic project and continued until the mining crisis of the 1960s. The state followed a paradigm of exogenous industrialization of the Italian South: through a series of special interventions under the *Piano di Rinascita del Mezzogiorno* (Plan for the rebirth of the South), the mining industry was reconverted by the creation, in Portovesme, of the large aluminium-related energy-metallurgical complex, which embodied national promises of wealth and modernity. The pole entered a crisis from the 1990s to 2000s, as production costs were no longer competitive and the logistics infrastructure inadequate. The resulting unemployment and the lack of any action to clean up the severely polluted site generated an unprecedented socio-ecological crisis (Bachis 2017) in the province of Carbonia-Iglesias, which remains the second poorest province in Italy[3]. Heritagization strategies for tourism, such as the creation of the Geo-mineral Park, constituted the regional authorities' response to this from the 1990s on. Then the Autonomous Region of Sardinia established the Piano Sulcis (Sulcis Plan) to deal with this crisis through several reconversion measures that remain incomplete. Today, RePowerEu and the European plan Just Transition Fund (of which Sulcis is a beneficiary) have a twofold local role: they promote investments into new sustainable energy macro-projects and they may allow foreign investors to derogate from the requirements of environmental feasibility studies.

There is ongoing friction between the two different and competing energy strategies, namely "transitional" methanization, promoted by the Autonomous Region[4], and the establishment of large renewables farms, promoted

2. https://www.isde.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2021-02-14-La-mortalit%C3%A0-in-Sardegna-nel-periodo-2012-2017.pdf.pdf
3. http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=11483
4. Sardinia is connected to the mainland through underwater power lines, though it lacks internal and external connections for gas. The Region prioritizes the strengthening of these links.

by the state. This large-scale move towards renewables is funded by big corporations and public agencies. In particular, wind farms are created using considerable outside capital. For example, in 2014 the Autonomous Region approved the construction of a cogeneration plant in Portovesme, planning a 3 TWh (terawatt hour) growth in energy production from renewables by 2030 (Osti 2018).

The national interest, first represented by strategic heavy industries, and now by sustainable energy, prevails over the right of local communities to decide on what happens in their own territory. Local communities complain that their land was first exploited by others, sacrificed and then abandoned, highlighting the lack of compensatory mechanisms and/or real involvement in the development that is the carried out under EU and national policies. Different economic cycles, different and often conflicting institutional strategies, created groups that are now competing for economic reasons. So political contention today is strongly focused on the use of land as a resource – for industry, for tourism, for power generation. These uses are hardly compatible.

I argue that the dispossession of both agency and land suffered by the local population meant that they had completely internalized the hyper-individualistic logic inherent in the imposed production and development model. To explore this, I locate my ethnography in San Pietro, asking which (new) kinds of citizenship – energy-related first, but not solely – and/or solidarities emerge here, exploring local communities' sense of agency in the face of public energy policies, both national and European. I argue that it is relevant to highlight the effects of the dispossessions mentioned earlier. Here I refer to Isin's (2009) proposal to intend citizenship as a set of differentiated performances, asking if and how subjects act as citizens, constituting themselves as those with the "right to claim rights" (Isin 2009). I consider here the implicit normativity in my interlocutors' idea of citizenship, exploring some paradoxes proper to "cultural citizenship" (Rosaldo 1994) that would seem to aspire to recognition by the liberal state (Taylor 1994). I ask if cultural citizenship is harnessed to an individualist particularism proper to logics of extracting value from anything as a founding principle. My aim is, as Graeber (2004) put it, to extract from its context a specific conception of the political dimension, grasping the ethnographically derived meaning of local political categories (Piliavsky, Scheele 2022). In the face of the extractive powers and social fragmentation imposed by the "conjunction of late capitalism with late liberalism" (Povinelli 2021) as a wider process, I wonder whether, and in what terms, in this very micro-con-

text, political subjectivities outside the logic of capital may (or may not) arise, and whether experiments in (energy) citizenship can be likened to self-instituting processes with a different basis from the logic of the logic of profit and speculation.

The ethnography here is organized into four blocks. The first introduces Carloforte, its ethnicism around the *tabarkina* identity, and places it in a regional framework of protests against renewables. The second shows how individualization, and a sense of ownership of the island's land and resources emerge as major constructs in relation to energy and related public policies. The third studies local political actors and emerging logics in relation to large offshore wind projects. The fourth shows some local distancing strategies from the environmental issues associated with industrial production in Portovesme.

Methodology

I am reflecting here on fieldwork that began in mid-2021 and still ongoing[5]. First, I examined policy documents (regional and national energy plans), then I conducted a first round of semi-inductive interviews with local actors such as former coalminers and workers at the ENEL thermoelectric power station in the province of Carbonia-Iglesias, and Sardinian journalists and academics. Then, in Carloforte, a first round of semi-structured interviews involved seven main informants, to record their socio-demographic details and degree of involvement in the EU-funded renewables project, as well as the local idea of cultural identity. In that way, I established my first base of local interlocutors, some of whom became long-term participants. Some local administrators, who introduced energy transition projects in Carloforte, and some local intellectuals, quickly became my main interlocutors. My ethnography is based on direct observations and informal exchanges. First, I was looking for local eco-activists – described later in the article. I updated my data with direct observations and analysis of secondary data (mainly political flyers and websites) in October 2023. The deal with my informants the content of their interviews would be anonymized. So, under a sociological point of view, I say little about them here because, Carloforte being such a small community[6], it would otherwise be very easy to identify them. I also consider secondary sources – mainly historical information provided by local actors, and the apps and institutional websites of the Carloforte municipality.

5. Thanks to H2020 MSCa-COFUND G.A. 101034324 and SC3, G.A. 884565.
6. About 6,000 persons in an area of 5 km^2, 1 in 6 of them second-home owners.

The green island of the Mediterranean

I started from a place that is involved in, but that constantly recalls its specificity with respect to the rest of the Sulcis: San Pietro, its extreme offshoot, 6 km from the industrial area of Portovesme. The island has only been inhabited since 1738, when Charles Emmanuel III, Duke of Savoy and King of Sardinia, granted it as a colony to a small group of people of Ligurian origin (from Pegli), who arrived from the Tunisian island of Tabarka, where they had been fishing for coral since 1542. Historically, the inhabitants of San Pietro rhetorically distance themselves from the socio-economic dynamics of Sulcis by claiming a strong ethnolinguistic difference (Toso 2008), as descendants of the Ligurian settlers.

Territorial discontinuity, some degree of matrifocality (Tiragallo 2008), an endogamic marriage structure, genetic isolation (Calò, Vona 1994) are distinctive elements. The use of dialect as an ethnolinguistic marker (Toso 2008), culinary repertory, sea-related professional specializations, historic vicissitudes and ethnic homogeneity are the main traits mobilized to define this diversity. The way Sardinia and San Pietro perceive each other contributed to the construction of asymmetrical reciprocal visions (Tiragallo 2015), where the perceptions of centre and periphery don't match up.

I found here a community that compactly claims a very strong ethnic identity, the "tabarkina" one. Some people use this to attract tourists, others to negotiate with the regional authorities, still others to attract European funds, and others, finally, to escape the narrative characterizing Sulcis as a region that has lost out on development. This identitarian construct, which existed prior to the emergence of current issues, enables cohesion and shapes the framework of political claims against the planning of large offshore wind farms, as in other contexts (Normann 2021), where opposition to green energy planning takes on the features of an indigenous protest. So, a claimed and sometimes strategic essentialism (Spivak, Harasym 1990), together with performed "islandness" with ethnicist traits (Vallebona 1975; Navarra 2012; Tiragallo 2015), are distinctive aspects mobilized by the people of San Pietro. This historical distinctive identification with the *tabarkini* settlers is reactivated in numerous positionings, especially those of a symbolic, economic and political nature. Every store, from the pizzeria to the hardware store, carries the "*tabarkino*" sign. When considered in its organized, institutional and non-institutional manifestations, the community discursively exhibits its ethnicity all the time and performs it constantly. Popular festivals that celebrate the community's

specificity are the most important events of the year, like the *Festa di San Pietro*, dedicated to the patron saint of the island, which opens the tourist season, or the *Girotonno*[7], a gastronomical event that promotes tuna from the local fishery, and specific cultural elements characteristic of its local production: "The ancient tradition and millenary culture of tuna in a corner of paradise in Sulcis Iglesiente, in Carloforte". Actually, the pervasive tuna-talk is probably the most important among several vernacular elements of authenticity in social talk (Heatherington 2001).

Mistakenly equating the community with the island, I expected people's emotional attachment to the place itself to constitute a resource, and to motivate a collective engagement oriented towards conserving the environment; opposing the development models adopted in nearby Portovesme, that expose the whole community to severe pollution; and community-based management of renewable energy sources – an area in which the small island is a pioneer. Indeed, all the economically hegemonic social groups (institutional representatives, small touristic entrepreneurs, tuna entrepreneurs), together with external public institutions, environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Sardinian journalists, promote a narrative about the "green vanguard isle". San Pietro is currently engaged in a number of EU-funded initiatives related to renewables. At the same time, its neighbours on the island of Sardinia and the surrounding seas are targeted by big new infrastructure projects linked with decarbonization, mainly through large onshore and offshore wind plants.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the town of Carloforte, the only one on the island, was the second port in Sardinia after Cagliari, from which cargoes of minerals from Sulcis departed (Atzeni 2009). The island has long been both school and home to high-ranking sailors (officers) and today houses a Nautical Institute of regional renown, attracting students from the neighbouring province. As testified by Vallebona (1975) and Tiragallo (2015), for these two main reasons – trade and sailors' remittances – historically the island is richer and, unlike Sulcis, does not have alarming unemployment rates. Carloforte is locally perceived as radically different from the rest of agro-pastoral, and subsequently industrial, Sardinia.

Today, Carloforte has become marginal, especially when compared to its role as a port open to a Mediterranean-wide cosmopolitanism. To leave Carloforte one must take the ferry and cross to Portovesme, and then travel to

7. https://girotonno.it/

Carbonia; these have become new interfaces and points of passage and borders, shaping new mental geographies.

In the hidden and uninhabited area called "Nasca", hard to reach by car, the island hosts what was among the first Italian wind-farm prototypes, built by Ansaldo (Genova). Nearby is a municipal-owned photovoltaic system. Together, the wind and solar plants produce 2,500 MWh (megawatt/hours). Carloforte Energie Rinnovabili, a company based in Bergamo, manages these renewables plants since 2010, under a tender. The energy flows into the national grid and the municipality receives royalties. The site was pointed out to me by the mayor, and I repeatedly visited it but, significantly, many islanders have only a vague recollection of the existence of these plants; if they know of their existence, they consider them abandoned. Repeated acts of vandalism over the years have damaged them.

Seeing the island merely as a platform for experimental energy prototypes and the production of externally owned energy that is consumed elsewhere, many local people see the ecological transition devices (solar power plants or wind farms) as coming from above. For some (administrators), this is a sign of external recognition of excellence. For others, a symptom of dispossession. In the sea off Carloforte today, windfarms are scheduled to be installed[8], intended to be the largest in Italy.

It was only after several field trips that arguments emerged, alongside the strategic environmentalism performed by some Carlofortini, that imply an admission of the impoverishment of the island, as well as the rest of Sardinia, the target of old and new energy-type extractions. The "turbines must bring wealth here, not to Italy", many say in the village, among people (with both technical and non-technical backgrounds) I meet in public assemblies on energy issues and among interlocutors (mostly small shopkeepers) who don't participate in public debates, in informal exchanges.

A shared contrariety, that in some cases has turned into protest against offshore wind power plants, converges today with a broader Sardinian movement against planned expropriations of agricultural properties (mostly in the Nuraxi Figus and Selargius areas) for the installation of onshore wind farms. This movement took the form of protests in the late summer/early fall of 2023, in Cagliari, with the result (so far) that the Sardinia Autonomous Region took its time with respect to implementing the expropriations. A regional movement,

8. https://www.mase.gov.it/comunicati/eolico-offshore-pervenute-64-manifestazioni-di-interesse

"*Sulcis Iglesiente Ribelle*"[9] now seeks to bridge the mainland movement and Carlofortine opposition to the offshore installations, pivoting on the claim of a colonialism[10] suffered by both land and sea areas.

Leveraging solar panels

To grasp the process of local differentiation and the rhetoric on renewable energy-related artefacts, I followed local participation[11] in a H2020-funded project, REACT[12]. I explored whether the claimed cultural difference could serve as a basis for acquiring the cultural and cognitive means to trigger solidarity from below, at the community level, imagining that their collective installation by networked individual actors via the REACT programme could constitute a kind of act of energy citizenship. So I established relationships with long-term interlocutors among actors interested in installing solar panels through REACT.

The current mayor of Carloforte is an important promoter of sustainability projects, pivoting on EU funding and trying to couple landscape conservation with economic sustainability. His administration believes that the island territory and its population can and should be involved in projects that aim to convert to renewables, guaranteeing benefits for the island itself as a priority (through a Renewable Energy Community – REC – for example), thus moving away from the extractive paradigm of Sardinia as a national energy extraction platform. The administration also promotes local, KM0, local produced food markets, electric cars for the municipality, separate waste collection and, as REACT's partner, had called assemblies to present it, as well as spreading the word about it via social networks. But, surprisingly, none of my interlocutors appeared to recall any of these assemblies. In any case, no one expected that this kind of device such as solar panels could be a means for sharing or exercising citizenship, or for a collective appropriation of the island's energy resources. Nobody could remember who else had attended the assembly, which had taken place at the Ex-Me (*ex mercati*) cultural centre, downtown – although this is a very small town where almost everyone knows everyone

9. https://www.rivoluzioneanarchica.it/sulcis-iglesiente-ribelle/#/
10. Among the militants, and more broadly in common sense, colonialism is linked to the issue of military servitude ("*servitù militari*") in Sardinia and/or the long-term claims of Sardinian independence.
11. https://www.unionesarda.it/3-minuti-con/il-sogno-di-unisola-green-sta-diventando-realta-tmg28e2k
12. https://react2020.eu/it/

else. So it is unlikely that the information they gave me was complete. It is more likely that this was a way of dampening down the emphasis that I, naively, gave to it. This surprise prompted me to further investigate the reasons behind what I saw, at first, as a missed opportunity.

Some informants explained that the project became more successful when the municipality began to publicize it on social media. So, a purely individualized horizon of participation seems to emerge. Or rather, none of the people I talked to saw this as an opportunity to express collective participation through assemblies. In informal conversations, often after an initial semi-structured exchange, and with a kind of hidden script, many interlocutors (both among householders, shopkeepers, and touristic operators, with different political-partisan backgrounds) said that the real reason why they agreed to the installation of individual solar panels financed by the EU scheme was to reduce their energy bills. Informants, both commercial and private, do not believe that H2020 represents a real tool for building spaces of energy citizenship. In many cases, when I can get people to go over the EU/renewables topic, they connect solar panels and offshore turbines, showing their distrust of the rhetoric of a transition they believe is extractive (Franquesa 2018) and "without justice" (McDermott Hughes 2021), because it exports the energy extracted on the island elsewhere, with no local benefits. In doing so, they enact resistance to such dispositions while still managing – in some cases – to appropriate resources (solar panels, which bring economic benefits to the household). While not considering resources such as the Mistral wind or sunlight, but only the portion of the land they impact on, as their own, my interlocutors seem to have in mind an idea of citizenship understood as the exercise of a land right. For example, Gillo, a retired policeman, who participated in the REACT citizens' assemblies, explains that he is absolutely interested in individual photovoltaic installations because "I use the sun of my land to heat myself, and I save as well!" But when we talk about offshore wind, or other larger photovoltaic installations, he says:

> Those are the wealth of our territory. They want to take them away, they are multinationals, they do business with our land. And we are left with nothing. Nothing. It's like with the industries. They do business, they take everything away. And then it's not like that's stuff we need, we have energy, too much of it. That all goes into the national grid. Not to the Carlofortini. (Gillo, Carloforte, 02/2022)

Indeed, the citizenship that some of my interlocutors mobilize is aimed at defending the perimeter of their territory from external economic exploita-

tion. This becomes even more meaningful when we consider that this is an island of owners. However, I argue that this attempt to resemantize citizenship by reconceptualizing it so it overlaps with ownership is an outcome of dispossessions that have also affected political language and imaginaries on the nature and the possibilities of the citizenship and of the self-instituted "common" (Dardot, Laval 2014). The home seems to be the main energy landscape over which my interlocutors, apart from the institutional representatives, feel they have an influence. This led me to grasp the dimensions and depth of the lack of any sense of a proactive mobilization to reappropriate resources, or a communitarian approach to the question of environmental justice and/or energy, which – as we shall see – only takes shape in the dynamics of opposition to an energy power with colonial traits, as in Greece, described by Argenti and Knight (2015).

When I speak about energy ownership and/or self-management as a possible horizon for self-instituted citizenship, the only reference to any sort of community is to the family. Curiously, in informal conversations, very often all my interlocutors compare Carloforte community to a family "where we fight and love each other". This phrase is important because it emerges, regardless of the social position of the speaker, in contexts of a kind of simulated intimacy with me, that is, when I am meant to be told a secret that will open whole windows of understanding about the community. Actually, it seems rather to be a verbal action that blocks further investigation. What the boundaries are between the sense that is given to family, and to community, is difficult to determine, as they often say "community is like a family, where we help each other, even economically, if one has more, he helps those who have less". This phrase was uttered to me in February 2022 by Lino, a book dealer and long-term interlocutor, and since then I have never stopped hearing it. This discourse denies the social fragmentation and economic disparities that do exist, depoliticizing them. It seems that the difficulty with making political structures, or establishing alliances based on converging economic interests, is further evidence of the dispossessions suffered during decades of top-down planning, which brought the economic interests of workers from industry, tourism and shipping into conflict. This brings us back to the cultural citizenship described by Rosaldo (1994), which relies solely on its own diversity as a reason for superior rights (for Sardinians, for example), and the kind of social atomization that underlies it. This is, of course, a process that affects society

on a much larger scale, affecting the ability to coalesce and struggle in relation to labour transformations (Lazar 2023).

Importantly, very different socio-economic strata of the population see tourism as a crucial resource. This convergence probably finds its material explanation in the fact that almost everyone in Carloforte owns at least two houses, one in the village and one in the country, as I directly observed during the fieldwork. Tiragallo (2015) explains that this is a result of the Duke of Savoy's donation of the island to the settlers. Almost everyone, therefore, has at least one house to rent to tourists, and this represents an important supplementary income for everyone. Even local sympathizers of Sulcis Iglesiente Ribelle oppose renewables plants, because they would not only disrupt the tuna route but also "drive tourists away', as one of the group's historic members said in a public assembly (in September 2023). If tourism embodies the promise of economic autonomy, it seems to also bring dependence once again, and neo-extractivism (Svampa 2019; Gudynas 2021).

Like the rest of Sardinia, San Pietro is a tourist destination. However, because it is poorly connected to Cagliari airport and generally not easily accessible, the islanders (local representatives and tourist sector workers) imagine that "their" tourists are radical-chic and ecologically aware. The island is indeed historically and continuously frequented by members of a national technical, cultural and political elite seeking a secluded place. From a discursive point of view, and in economic micro-practices, tourism seems to be the only plane on which there is an interaction outside the family perimeter, bringing wealth from outside. Some informants, mainly owners of small hotels or restaurants, assume that tourists will appreciate the ecological practices suggested by individual, small and landscaped non-invasive photovoltaic panels.

Carlo, a teacher and bed and breakfast owner, like many:

> The tuna economy has changed [...] everything has changed. So I keep saying that what we have left is tourism. And we also must learn to swallow some toads, we should learn to be nicer, more cheerful, to plan more bread in the summertime. All these things here that in my opinion we don't do, and we don't do them not because we are dumb, but because Carloforte has always been an average country richer than those on the other side. An island like this must be able to have plans to attract that small niche of tourists who go on purpose to the eco-sustainable, low-polluted places. (Carlo, Carloforte, 06/2021)

Alongside the instrumentality of the energy transition, this consideration is dominant among interlocutors and suggests a pattern of dependence, probably derived from the industrial history, similar to that described by Pusceddu

(2018) in Brindisi. Even in the tourist sector, it is not only the wealth, but also social change that should come from outside. It seems within the reach of my informants, mostly among small hotel keepers and representatives, to make strategic use of a performed ecological identity to attract tourists who like to imagine themselves as environmentally conscious. This downplays the political potential of actions that could be thought of as collective claims to autonomy. It should be read considering the dispossessions described by Murray Li (2010) and West (2016). To support this argument, I point out that the less social capital my interlocutor seems to have, the greater the degree of instrumentality with which he or she speaks about environmental issues. It is easier for those who administer or have a recognized intellectual role to express themselves in a more proactive and planning way towards the ecological transition, highlighting their agency. The local élites, administrators or intellectuals, organize actions closer to an idea of citizenship – energetic and not only – as participation. Participation could be opposition – as we will see – but also the possibility to think themselves as a collective subject with the right to claim collective rights.

Offshore wind farms

The *Unione Sarda,* one of the two main Sardinian newspapers, often mentions Italy's colonialist energy stance in Sardinia[13]. One article[14] describes a meeting in Calasetta between the mayors of Carloforte, Portoscuso and Calasetta, three small maritime communities. The mayor of Portoscuso reportedly said:

> Yes to the energy transition, but not to a Far West of wind turbines imposed on us from above, without any information, without any certainty about the risks to other resources in the area, and without clarifying the fallout on the territory. […] Yesterday in Calasetta lots of people responded to the invitation from the local authority, which organized a meeting to take stock of the situation on the wind power front. […] The communities risk having to coexist with hundreds of wind turbines a few dozen kilometres from the coast. […] It's not about being alarmist. We understand the energy transition can't be stopped, but the lack of rules terrifies us. The regional authority hasn't established any, and neither has the government. We're in the south of Sardinia, a south that was exploited in the past in every way, and then abandoned. That's why the idea of the wind farm in front of our coastline scares us. […] We still don't really know what size the turbine blades are, but we do know how high the ENEL chimney is, and the wind turbines are even

13. A recurring theme of Sardinian autonomism that never caught on in San Pietro, perhaps precisely because of the deep-rooted sense of being external to Sardinia.
14. July the 2nd, 2022.

> higher. Tourism and fishing are precious resources for us. What impact will the wind farms have? It's not just a question of aesthetics. This is an assault.

Then the mayor of Carloforte states:

> The topic of the energy transition is very important to us. [...] We're in a chaotic phase and we need answers. We have a resource and people who have space for investments try to make them. I think we should understand the role of the regional authority in this game, I believe in a coordination between territories.

Opposition to the wind turbines comes from below, involving the population of Carloforte and the neighbouring municipalities in a transversal way. This was a subject on which I questioned many people, voicing economic interests large and small, hoteliers, fishermen, the owners of the *tonnara* (historical tuna processing site, still in use today), who have long opposed the project. The mayors – and especially Carloforte's mayor, newly elected in 2022 – are striving to give an institutional voice to the opinions expressed in their municipalities by declaring that the matter is a dispute between institutional leaders, rather than between technologies or abstract ideas of the future. These voices from below have been present for some years, however. I started recording them in 2021, incidentally, because many people raised the subject themselves. In June 2021, for example, one tourist sector worker explained:

> I'm rather against the wind farms in the sea. They're on the tuna route and they could disrupt something that has been going on for centuries. (Franco, Carloforte, 06/2021)

Though the people of Carloforte do not consider him a true resident of the island, Giovanni, one of the workers of the *tonnara* (which is one of the major economic players in Carloforte) joined the mobilization in progress and became an important opponent of the wind turbines. Talking about a collective action he said:

> You should say that we're setting up a committee between all the municipalities here in the area, and we shall start to make as much fuss as possible and imaginable. If they demonstrate that this thing can be done without posing problems, we're not aprioristically against it. But we're very suspicious of people that come and do these things in our backyard without first considering that it's the place where I live. (Giovanni, Carloforte, 10/2021)

In these instances a "we" as a political subject appears, designating the local community. Political anthropology applied to energy postulates that energy infrastructures delineate the boundaries between the prerogatives of the state

and local communities, both in material terms and through projections onto the imaginary of the future and the environment. So, examining how these prerogatives are negotiated in an emic sense, an idea of citizenship emerges whose content consists in the right to decide on (one's own) land on an autochthonous basis. Curiously, here a non-native, and actually a non-resident, evokes it to tune in to residents' protests.

In the face of public energy policies, my interlocutors among local administrators and in the general economic elite, seem to have in mind citizenship as a set of differentiated performances of participation (against wind turbines, for energy community). During these actions, and unlike when they describe themselves in the ordinary sphere, that is as a family, they seem to be constituting themselves as a those with the "right to claim rights" (Isin 2009: 371). So, anti-turbines participation takes an anti-state form in ordinary discourse, in many conversations I have or hear on the island, but – with the contribution of the municipal institutions – it becomes organized and takes shape as a claim to citizenship and a demand for the right to have a voice. The fact that the organized voice of this protest borders on a NIMBY attitude at times may be interpreted as a sign of the pervasiveness of policies that crush actors at the first hint of any opposition, leaving little space to think beyond a stark dialectic between the imposition of grand projects and local resistance. If the mayor of Carloforte talks about his concern over the lack of safeguards and rules governing the exploitation of the land by the regional authorities and the government, and the Calasetta mayor recalls a time when the territories of southern Sardinia were exploited and abandoned, the issues of dispossession exist and have a structuring influence among several social strata. Participatory opposition seems to be not so much against the wind turbines *per se*, but against the methods of governance that involve Sulcis without considering its citizens as actors to engage, and thus eroding their very possibility to think and act as citizens.

Nando is a middle-aged man who has a specialized technical job and hopes regarding the professional life of his sons, recently enrolled in Cagliari University. Discussing in a public assembly the possibility of instituting an REC, Nando claims there is a need to "do things differently from the state" and support projects that "leave the wealth here where it is, on the island', and "create skilled jobs for our young people who are all leaving for Milan". This may suggest that it is the top-down logic inherent in the energy policies that individualizes subjects and obstructs their capacity to project themselves in a community through (energy) citizenship, and not the energetic transition itself.

There is potential, in Carloforte, to establish an REC and become autonomous in terms of energy, which would be an opportunity for the population to gain control through shared planning based on a form of energy citizenship. This is something that, for now, the population simply does not talk about outside assemblies devoted to this subject, organized by the administration with the support of technicians, academics, and EU-funded projects. Indeed, a curious loop has been created, whereby some of the interlocutors with whom I am closest ask me for information on the development of the REC. That perhaps reveals once again the shared idea that (energy) politics are not made locally. In informal exchanges, the energy question still seems to be contained in the effort to oppose offshore wind farms, which are the catalyst for local planning of the space, and the potential of this effort to create solidarity from below.

To support what emerges as structural pattern, other forms of assembly, well attended by the population, triggered from below, and networked with other Sardinian municipalities, were organized to oppose the local authorities' plan to establish a marine protected area around Carloforte. This topic comes up spontaneously as an example of local participative resistance when we discuss wind turbines, especially with those who do not have roles in the administration. My interlocutors extol the participation of a community "that will not be fooled" (by local authorities, here). Many saw the proposal as a form of top-down oppression that would affect tourism and prevent the islanders from enjoying the sea through recreational fishing. Their idea of the sea as a precious asset overrode their concern for the conservation of marine biodiversity, which would help to support the idea that indigenization and Edenization are forms of resistance of dispossessed populations to "global environmentalism" (Heatherington 2010). Today, however, people who enthusiastically opposed the marine protected area affirm that the protection project would be definitively buried by the offshore shovels creating the wind farms, and this would be a far worse evil. In short, those who oppose the marine conservation area can use it as an argument against the wind farms in the overriding interest of ensuring a minimum of control over the territory can be preserved.

Marginalizing activism

As mentioned at the beginning, this is the story of the search for an environmental activism that was not found, and the discovery, instead, of a different kind of participation against "global ecological dreams" (Heatherington 2010).

In fact, a very small group of four to ten people in Carloforte (according to hetero- and/or auto-definitions from different sources) claim to be environmental justice movement. All members, and particularly the group's founder and leader, Claudio, a bartender[15], are perceived as too radical and lacking in pragmatism by practically all the other inhabitants. It is in Claudio's bar that several dozen people gather in September 2023 for the *Sulcis Iglesiente Ribelle* assembly mentioned earlier. Back to tuna-talk as a practice of political positioning: many in the village, when talking about Claudio, begin by explaining: "Figure it out! He doesn't even serve tuna in his bar!". Consistently, at our first meeting, he proudly explains that he does not sell it (he calls tuna "this tuna rub'). Tuna is an important symbolic resource for the community – although its production is owned by a Genovese family – it is a resemantized element that often replaces properly political language, which has been strongly desemantized over the past decades.

Anna, a restaurant-owner, speaks openly. Together with a friend, Salvatorina, she describes the "movement" in these terms:

> *Anna* So Claudio, he's more than 60 years old, but he's an eternal youngster. A real diehard about the environment. He won't serve Coca-Cola or Sprite, he doesn't want the multinationals in his bar. His whole life is influenced like that. Yes, they protest against Portovesme. Yes, because of the pollution. They've protested lots of times.
> *Salvatorina* And for the clean-up of the beaches, for all those sorts of things. Clearing the rubbish from the bays. He's very catastrophist. He says everything's polluted and we're all going to die. As a person, he's a bit of an extremist.
> *Anna* But he's very well informed so he may be able to help if you want to get an idea … Let's say that in the environmental sector he's certainly more expert. (Carloforte, 06/2021)

Claudio is more than willing to talk to me, seeing my presence as a chance to turn the spotlight on environmental issues. But it was not easy to gain access to him; a couple of intermediaries among his friends, had to vouch for me by affirming my political attitude, evidenced by my past research in the European and Latin American anarchist and eco-socialist movements. My search for signs of citizenship or activism laid the groundwork for a commonality of views. In a conversation in his bar, at the beginning of my stay, he said: "Here, folks do not participate. Do you know when they participate? If the marine reserve is to go ahead" (Carloforte, 10/2021). And this resonat-

15. The speaker is clearly identifiable; he gave me permission to quote his words, considering it an act of demonstrating his political beliefs.

ed with what I was noting and set out above. His ecological positions, called radical by other islanders, do not seem to subvert the hegemonic order of the current production system, but rather point towards the conservation of the landscape and health. Rather, he expresses his most radical criticisms against his fellow citizens" lack of democratic political participation, which he attributes to non-democratic structures he calls "Masonic". This again shows a feeling of exclusion from decision-making processes.

On the other hand, activists led by Claudio also advance conservationist claims regarding the landscape, and oppose wind power off the island. Paradoxically, they are sympathizers of environmental NGO Legambiente, which few in Carloforte and outside would describe as a radical organization and that openly supports the offshore wind farm. Claudio has been a member for years. In a post of 1 June 2021, for instance, they wrote: "Sunrise with a view of a gas tanker and the chimneys at *Mortovesme*, and dusk at the lighthouse with a forest of wind turbines. NO THANKS!"[16]. This post refers to the view from Carloforte, from where you can see Portovesme to the east, while the proposed wind farm would be visible to the west.

Apart from them, my interlocutors in Carloforte tend to downplay their relationship with this difficult industrial neighbour, Portovesme, especially as regards their work: "We make a living from something else." So it seems that activism and open politicized claims for environmental justice are connected to the possibility of talking explicitly about this very charged topic. This statement of non-dependence hides the fact that those industries, on the other hand, employ several hundred people in Carloforte. Portovesme has long been the most important alternative to seafaring work, which forces men to be absent for months at a time. "We're sailors," "Not many people worked there" – statements like these are usually followed by people admitting how the plants affect the population of Carloforte in terms of unemployment and health issues once a certain degree of intimacy is established. Although the issue of illnesses linked to industrial pollution lies at the heart of a story of plundering and profound socio-environmental injustice, it is experienced as belonging to the private sphere. It emerges with difficulty, and painfully, in our exchanges, and my questions are often clearly considered inopportune. Sometimes, with the persons that I get to know best, the topic can emerge spontaneously, as in the case of the two woman who run a restaurant proudly

16. https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Environmental-Conservation-Organization/Carlofortini-Preoccupati-906419312769838/

announcing itself as "communist for several generations". To be "communist" in Carloforte is to situate oneself in an administrator's lineage and root oneself in the history of the island, renewing the construct of autochthony inherent in ethnicity. I glimpse a watermark of dense family relations. The point is that one ideological framework, here embodied in the definition of self as "communist', allows for a margin of resistance to the dispossessions at issue, and defines the possibility of, at least, talking about it, and thus of thinking of oneself as a citizen-subject potentially entitled to demand protections as a community.

> *Teresa* In Portoscuso, they had all the nylon [clothesline threads, n.d.a.] that had turned black by now. It was pointless for them to tell the Regional Authority to do something. They built houses [...] the industries and the people who worked there, close by [...] full, full [of oncological diseases].
> *Patrizia* Yeah, well, it's no joke here either. In Carloforte ... we keep quiet, but ... yes, there's quite a high percentage. We're lucky to have the Mistral wind that carries it away.
> *Teresa* Once the fish died. On this side, near us on the jetty, everywhere. It happened that they released some liquid. The usual accidents that happen, and it ended there. These were Americans. Eh, often they change [...] nationality. They've taken masses of metres of stuff abandoned there to dispose of it. They give them the money and then they let them go. (Patrizia and Teresa, Carloforte, 02/2022)

Mobilizing, taking collective action to draw attention to these issues, is seen as something on the fringes of the townspeople's repertoire, and even stigmatized, as emerges from the descriptions of Claudio If ethnic particularism seems a constant in the history of at least the last century (as Toso, Vallebona, and Tiragallo attest), what is new, on the other hand, is the Edenic imagery that is woven into it. In fact, as long as Carloforte was an important port, its being associated with a technical-nautical vanguard was quite highly valued. Even today, the techno-avant-garde narrative is mobilized by local administrators and elites endowed with more important social capital, especially to show the island's suitability to host, manage and appropriate tools (EU funds; infrastructures) of energy experimentation. In contrast, allochronism and the Edenic and conservationist discourse is mobilized by those working in small-scale tourism.

Conclusions

I hypothesized that the dispossessions suffered by the local population meant that they had completely internalized the hyper-individualistic logic inherent in the imposed production models. This has disarticulated the

community, generating different and competing interests between groups of workers dependent on the steel/coal industry and other economies (tourism, fishing, seafaring). The primordial dispossession here thus seems to be what deprives the islanders of the ability to think of and defend themselves as a community. Reactivating ethnicity seems to come in handy as a mechanism for recomposing, at least rhetorically, the community, faced with policies locally framed as neo-extractive (Svampa 2019; Gudynas 2021) that would make the island a "sacrifice zone" (Lerner 2010; McDermott Hughes 2021) with no benefits for the island.

The contrast between marginality and centrality made San Pietro a site where it was in itself interesting to question the premises and outcomes of European decarbonization policies, placing Sulcis in a context of spatial injustice (Harvey 1997). As a whole, the Carloforte islanders manifest a dispossession and lack of agency that I ascribe to a structural environmental violence (Galtung 1969). Elsewhere in southern Italy (Benadusi et al. 2021) and Spain (Franquesa 2018), similar ideologies and planning aiming at sustainability, based on renewable energy, promise a substantial and inevitable alternative to the hetero-directed and extractive model of development that has been imposed in southern Italy in the twentieth century. Similar to Argenti and Knight's (2015) description of the Greek case, making use of natural resources is perceived here as an economic extraction programme, associated more with the global South than with the energy transition. In this sense, Sulcis region has first-hand experience of the cultural dynamics of dispossession (Heatherington 2010; Murray Li 2010; West 2016), understood as a combination of marginality, a sense of dependency on external factors, an industrial *deus ex machina*, and economic exploitation by external, speculative capital. Although the local community claims to suffer from unemployment and health problems directly linked to the coal and steel industry, and although several Sardinian actors present the local people as ecologically aware, I could see no bottom-up mobilizations or new grassroots solidarity. Instead, social fragmentation – which also emerges in some Sicilian case studies (Benadusi et al. 2021) – is a salient feature of my fieldwork, as it reveals actions and potential movements that can hardly be characterized as (energy) citizenship (Harvey et al. 2017; McDermott Hughes 2021). Allocations, dispossessions and transition plans imposed by large national and supra-national economic actors have fragmented local communities, even those that discursively set themselves apart from the disastrous situation in Sulcis. This has gone on

to such an extent that these communities have become entrenched in their conviction that they have no power whatsoever to change society, or that any transformation is not theirs to make. My interlocutors have varying degrees of difficulty when it comes to identifying the community as a key and proactive part of the energy transition process, a self-instituted entity and/or an actor of social transformation more broadly.

The only mechanism that seems capable of supporting a sense of community integrity lies in a strong discursive distancing – through ethnicity – from the functional/economic Sulcis, constructing political action only as acts and not as a flow of rights and action at work in the ordinary (Carrel, Neveu 2014) dimension. This implies constructing citizenship as a cultural particularism that situates the population of Carloforte as a cut above the rest of Sardinians, and denying that they are part of a Sardinian society plagued by dispossessions. However, de-semantization of the political sphere shows that Carlofortinians have lost the language to talk about rights in ways that are not biological or symbolic. As in the Greek cases (Argenti, Knight 2015), a dialectic is established between narratives about green extraction and widespread conceptions of Carlofortinian insular ethnic identity. We can observe a similar phenomenon of "indigenization" of protest against "green colonialism" in Sami lands (Normann, 2021). This dimension strongly emerges in the face of offshore wind-farm projects. Ethnicism plays an ambiguous role, reactivating elements of common sense that are useful in opposing the possibility of a new cycle of dispossession taking place with the energy transition. If, in mainland Sardinia, this takes place based on the rhetoric of Sardinian autonomism, in San Pietro it takes place more through an ethnicism that, however, half-opens the door to the possibility of a material, micro-scale energy autonomy through setting up an REC.

Leveraging the EU-promoted energy transition as an ethnographic entry point, I have shown that (a) decades of national and international industrial policies that failed to involve the local population or regional decision-makers; (b) top-down imposition of development models based first on coal, and now on large-scale renewable energy plants; and (c) an idea of Sardinia as a large production platform – have profoundly fragmented the local population's sense of community and their possibility to think of themselves as citizens in the ordinary (Carrel, Neveu, 2014). My study suggests that this situation has undermined the ability of whole communities to aspire to, and carve out, margins of agency that do not lead back to relationships of dependence

and subordination (the sale of the landscape to the tourists), and their ability to build generative alliances and grassroots solidarities, radically breaking out of the interpretative framework of top-down modernization through industry that they experienced in the past. Attempts to act as a community and exploit the levers of citizenship in order to try to own their destiny in a proactive way are rarely shared, and unable to shape political, individual or collective subjectivities. The primordial dispossession here thus seems to be of a semantic order that deprives the islanders of the ability to think of and defend themselves collectively, to claim "the right to claim rights".

The possibility of energy citizenship arising in this context is limited. However, the resistance strategies and awareness of the actors, who escape the participatory devices proposed by the promoters of the European energy transition, should not be underestimated. Carlofortinians hardly recognize these devices as having the status of true participatory processes. Nonetheless, if the dynamics of extractive exploitation of natural resources were altered, that is, if Carlofortinians were faced with proposals that would bring the economic benefits of the transition to the island territory itself, in terms of local employment, savings, and health benefits for the territory, for example, the energy citizenship advocated by the European agenda might actually have a chance to take shape.

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