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CHALLENGING RULES

A study of minority nationalist party rhetoric and strategy
in Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland

Edward Walker, Durham University

Political norms and rules, whether discursive or formally embodied in constitutions and laws, regulate and constrain the spectrum of legitimate political action for political actors. In the case of major political principles and constitutional law, these norms and rules are particularly difficult to challenge and change. For most political parties operating broadly within the boundaries of their respective domestic political system, this is seldom an issue. In recent years however, several countries across Europe have faced a significant challenge from minority nationalist parties seeking recognition, major constitutional reforms and, in some cases, political independence for the territory they claim to represent. In this thesis, I analyse the various ways in which minority nationalist parties seek to challenge the rules and norms that prevent the legitimate realisation of their political goals. Simultaneously, I also analyse the ways in which the normative framework within which these parties operate domestically affects the nature of their political discourse and demands, with various parties adopting different discourses and emphasising different demands depending on the nature of the political system within which they operate. To successfully challenge established norms and rules, minority nationalist parties have also drawn upon different tools to legitimate their demands, ranging from the pursuit of political recognition to domestic electoral success and international lobbying within European institutions. Looking at these various elements, and drawing on three major European case studies (Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland), I develop a framework to analyse and understand why minority nationalist parties ‘speak’ and ‘act’ the way they do, providing a starting point for further, norm-focused comparative research on the fundamental challenge brought forward by minority nationalist parties in Europe and in other regions of the world.



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School of Government and International Affairs

Challenging Rules

**A study of minority nationalist party rhetoric and strategy in Catalonia,
Corsica and Scotland.**

Edward Walker

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

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Abbreviations

ANC Assemblea Nacional Catalana

CDC Convergència Demòcratica de Catalunya

CiU Convergència i Unió

CoR Committee of the Regions

CUP Candidatura d'Unitat Popular

DiL Democracia i Llibertat

ECRML - European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages

EESC European Economic and Social Committee

EFA European Free Alliance

ERC Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

FLNC Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse

ICV Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds

MEP Member of the European Parliament

PDeCAT Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català

SNP Scottish National Party

TTIP Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

To Emma

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Introduction

The start of the 21st century saw the emergence of several minority nationalist challenges to established nation-states across Western Europe. While, for many years, European observers questioned whether Belgium's future as a nation-state was secure in the face of growing linguistic divisions and growing nationalist feeling in Flanders (Morris, 2005), the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 brought about the first widespread public realisation that the breakup of established, western European states was no longer a fantasy desired by marginal political groups, but a concrete and potentially imminent reality. Since then, minority nationalist challenges to the established political order have become important within the political agenda of several European countries, and a recurring issue at the level of the European Union and other associated European institutions.

Minority nationalist movements and their demands have been a subject in academia for several decades. Recent bodies of literature can be found analysing the issue of minority nationalism from a European perspective, including studies on how the issue is addressed at the European level (Keating, 2004), others on the nature of minority nationalism and its interactions with Europe and the nation-state (Keating, 1996, 1998; Müller-Rommel, 1998). Other academics have focused either on case-specific analyses or small-number case comparisons between geographically or politically similar cases (Olivesi, 1998; Guibernau, 2000; Hepburn and Elias, 2011; Guibernau, 2013). Finally, others have focused on providing broader comparative studies of minority nationalist party stance on given issues (see Elias, 2008b for an example of this).

Building on this literature, this study seeks to provide a conceptual framework through which the actions, motivations and strategies of minority nationalist parties can be understood and analysed. Focusing on a small number of highly significant cases in western Europe, the conceptual tools used here provide a potential explanation as to why minority nationalist parties 'do what they do', how they do it and how they rationally adopt strategies to handle the sometimes significant political, constitutional and legal obstacles they face in implementing their aims. Starting from the idea of self-determination as the foundational concept behind all minority nationalist parties, the conceptual framework used in this study can explain party strategy, rhetoric, agenda-setting as well as potential divergences and convergences between minority nationalist parties in different domestic contexts.

Minority Nationalism

Before describing the purpose and aims of the study in detail, however, it is important to address the question of definition: while the term ‘minority nationalist’ is sometimes used in academic work, it is by no means the only term used. Other studies prefer terminology such as ‘ethnoregionalist party’ (Müller-Rommel, 1998; Türsan, 1998), or simply ‘regionalist party’ (Lynch, 1998; Olivesi, 1998) Other, more comprehensive terms such as ‘stateless nationalist and regionalist party’, have also been used in sections of the academic literature on the subject (Elias and Mees, 2017). All of these terms are broadly used to categorise the same parties in each of these studies. The definition of an ‘ethnoregionalist’ party, provided by Müller-Rommel, highlights some important elements and provides a good starting point:

‘Ethnoregionalist parties are defined as referring to the efforts of geographically concentrated peripheral minorities which challenge the working order and sometimes even the democratic order of a nation-state by demanding recognition of their cultural identity’ (Müller-Rommel, 1998)

This definition, as Müller-Rommel points out, excludes other forms of nationalist parties, notably those situated on the far-right of the political spectrum and those whose nationalist discourse is principally concerned with immigrant populations (Müller-Rommel, 1998). There are, however, several ways in which the definition above can be reworded to provide a clearer understanding of the fundamental principles that underpin minority nationalism, and the ways in which these are expressed politically. Minority nationalist do, perhaps more so than most other party families in Western Europe, seek to ‘challenge the working order and sometimes even the democratic order of a nation-state’. This, however, as I will describe in the third chapter of this study, can quite simply be understood as self-determination. While, as I will analyse, self-determination is complex and multi-layered both in its definition and in its political expressions, there are several characteristics that permeate most understandings of the concept: ascribed to a territorially bound group with a common identity (a ‘people’), self-determination is understood as a fundamental right through which a ‘people’ can determine both their political status and the terms of their economic and cultural development¹. In many countries, including in the three studied here, this often requires a change in the ‘working’ and ‘democratic’ ‘order’ of the nation-state.

¹ The United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples understands self-determination exactly in those terms. (United Nations, 1960a)

The notion of common identity, referred in chapter three as ‘peopleness’, also echoes the element of the definition focusing on the recognition of cultural identity. In many respects, the recognition of a given cultural identity is an essential pre-requisite for minority nationalist parties to claim self-determination as a right that applies, legitimately, to the ‘people’ they seek to represent.

Self-determination, therefore, is the fundamental principle that characterises minority nationalist parties. Drawing upon this, I propose the following definition for the purpose of this study: minority nationalist parties are political parties seeking self-determination on behalf of stateless, historically present, territorially-bound cultural or ethnic minorities within or across the boundaries of established states. Extending this definition, this pursuit of self-determination often takes the form of demands for cultural and political recognition, as well as demands for political control over cultural, social and economic matters.

With this definition and the ‘minority nationalist’ terminology in mind, a few additional points of definition need to be addressed before proceeding. The use of the word ‘minority’ to describe the type of nationalism espoused by the minority nationalist parties analysed here warrants a small clarification. The term ‘minority’ is used in this context to refer to the overall position of the population which parties seek to embody politically in contrast to the overall population of the state in which the population resides. As is hinted at in the definition, many of these ‘minorities’ at the scale of the state are, in fact, not minorities within their respective territories, a fact that emerges in the literature on self-determination, where opponents of secession caution against the risk of creating new minorities within newly created states (Buchanan, 2003). It is also important to highlight that the term ‘minority’ is not used in a dichotomous context here. The existence of minority nationalism within a given territory does not inherently imply the existence of an opposing ‘majority’ nationalism. While debates on matters such as identity, ‘peopleness’ and secession often develop into an opposition between ‘minority nationalism’ and a form of ‘state nationalism’ espoused, at least punctually, by political parties opposing the claims of minority nationalists, opposition to minority nationalists can also come from an anti-nationalist perspective, something for instance highlighted by Scottish National Party (SNP) Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Alyn Smith (Appendix A, interview 7) to explain the reason why many European-level politicians and officials are fundamentally sceptical of minority nationalist demands.

The definition also makes no assumption as to what form the pursuit of self-determination will take. Throughout the study, and throughout pre-existing academic literature on minority nationalist parties, the importance of context and the impact this has on the actions of these parties is paramount. It is unlikely that any definition fixing the forms in which self-determination is pursued (for instance limiting it to the pursuit of full, political independence) can satisfactorily cover the broad variety in which parties decide to draw upon and express self-determination in concrete policy (Elias and Mees, 2017). While I argue that self-determination is the fundamental element that drives minority nationalist parties, the forms in which this demand is expressed is heavily influenced by the political and historical context in which parties operate and varies almost certainly on a case-by-case basis.

Purpose of the study, conceptual tools and methodological approach.

For the purpose of this thesis, a theoretical framework was built drawing primarily on constructivist social theory and on the various iterations of it in different bodies of academic literature. Drawing from international relations constructivism as a starting point, I then supplement the constructivist social theory found in IR constructivism with concepts drawn from the study of norm diffusion, a body of work that shares many common principles with IR constructivism and drawn, broadly, from the same social theory. Finally, I also introduce concepts from historical institutionalism, to address the fact that many of the norms and rules challenged by minority nationalist parties are very well established and hard to challenge, a fact already recognised in social constructivism. However, in addition to this, historical institutionalism allows me to introduce the notion of critical junctures, which enables us to analyse why very long-standing and established norms can, in periods of exceptional crisis, be undermined and replaced by normative alternatives.

Echoing constructivism, this thesis focuses on three fundamental concepts: agency, norms and rules, and structure, all of which are interrelated through an ongoing process of mutual constitution. Mutual constitution, as the wording indicates, is a two-way process. Firstly, structure is understood as a set of institutions, rules, norms and practices that frame the spectrum of legitimate and ‘possible’, activity in the political realm (Wendt, 1999; Onuf *et al.*, 2013). Within structure, rules (understood here as legal, codified rules) and norms (understood as non-codified, political rules) constrain the spectrum of legitimate political action (and who can legitimately in political activity) in specific areas. Within each area, agents, who are

empowered to act as such within their respective areas of activity, draw legitimacy for their political actions from the rules and norms that regulate their behaviour.

While this top-down understanding of the relationship between structure, norms and agents is relatively uncontroversial, the notion of mutual constitution also conceptualises the ability of agents, through their political actions or discourse, to challenge, undermine and change existing established norms and structures. This notion conceptualises each political space as an area in which dominant norms and rules co-exist with an unlimited number of potential challenging norms brought forward and adopted by agents seeking to change the normative structure within which they operate.

This, in turn, does not inherently imply instability or constant change. Constructivism frequently theorises change as a slow, difficult and uncertain process. While change is indeed a possibility, established normative frameworks, because they regulate legitimacy in political action, are particularly difficult to challenge and undermine. Normative frameworks are subject to what is understood in historical institutionalism as ‘path dependency’, a concept according to which the longer an institution exists, the stronger its position and the degree of acceptance and legitimacy it enjoys becomes. Change, as a result, is frequently ‘slow’ and ‘costly’ (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 17)

Although path dependency can be a significant factor in promoting stability and continuity in normative frameworks, historical institutionalism also accounts for situations in which external crises, or the emergence and growing adoption of challenging norms, can lead to what is termed ‘critical junctures’ (Pierson, 2004), which can be understood as periods of time, or events, where long-established norms are suddenly challenged, discussed, assessed and in some cases replaced by alternatives. Change, while difficult, can also be brought about in a relatively brief period of time, causing what is often seen as the sudden collapse of established norms, ideologies, and sometimes the institutions and relations of power these norms underpin.

The theoretical framework described briefly above allows us to address a range of questions. In this thesis, constructivist conceptual tools are used to address the following issues:

- What principles, if any, characterise minority nationalist parties?
- To what extent are minority nationalist parties impacted by the domestic and international normative, legal, constitutional and political environment in which they operate?

- To what extent do minority nationalist parties affect and change that environment?
- Through what avenues do minority nationalist parties seek change?
- How do minority nationalist parties attempt to legitimise their demands?

Many of these questions are already widely addressed in the literature. However, mostly due to the constructivist theoretical framework used here, the way in which these questions are treated in this thesis differs, sometimes substantially, from the way this has been addressed in the literature so far.

Self-determination, and the role it plays at the heart of minority nationalist party rhetoric and ideology, is a good example of this. The centrality of self-determination, at the very least in its territorial dimension, is well recognised in the academic literature on minority nationalist parties. The relationship between territorial demands and other demands, including discussions about the primacy of one or the other and the ways in which territorial and economic demands are related, form an important part of the existing literature seeking to understand the electoral strategy of minority nationalist parties (see Elias and Tronconi, 2011; Alonso, Cabeza and Gómez, 2015; Elias and Mees, 2017; Elias, 2018). While territorial issues tend to dominate economic issues in the discourse of minority nationalist parties (Alonso, Cabeza and Gómez, 2015), academics have drawn highlight three different ways in which these two types of issues are related: blurring, in which economic rhetoric is vague and secondary, subsuming, in which economic issues are tied and subordinated to territorial issues, and two-dimensional, in which both issues are simultaneously and equally discussed by minority nationalist parties (Rovny, 2015; Elias, 2018).

The distinction between territorial issues and economic issues is one made in this thesis. In chapter three, institutional and economic grievances are identified, alongside identity-based grievances, as being important in the discourse and policy platforms of minority nationalist parties in Catalonia, Scotland and Corsica. It is argued, however, that all three types of grievances, rather than being fundamentally distinct, are normatively connected to the broader principle of self-determination. In all three cases analysed here, economic and institutional grievances are ‘subsumed’ in the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties, with economic grievances often depending on institutional solutions to be satisfied. While the distinction between these two types of grievances is clear in the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties, it is argued that all these grievances, whether territorial, institutional, economic or identity-based,

are rooted in the broader normative principle of self-determination, which is presented here as the fundamental principle underpinning minority nationalist parties today.

Drawing upon the idea of mutual constitution, it is expected that minority nationalist parties are both influenced, and influence, their political, normative and legal environment. This potential two-way relationship is also well discussed in the literature, however the approach taken here presents a few fundamental differences. Existing studies of minority nationalist party electoral strategy highlight the importance of internal and external factors influencing the positions taken up by these parties. External factors include, as is also evident in this thesis, the institutional structure of the state in which they operate, the structure of the party system and public opinion (Elias and Mees, 2017). This thesis, however, broadly disregards internal factors (understood as ideological debates or contests within parties) when discussing the rhetoric, strategy and policies of minority nationalist parties. This is done for several reasons: parties, in this thesis, are understood as unitary and single agents, following the widely accepted notion of ‘corporate agency’ (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 67) according to which agency can be ascribed to institutions, groups of people and, in this case, parties as opposed to simply being a feature of single individuals. Secondly, there was little evidence, in the period analysed, of internal conflicts being visible in public rhetoric and policy statements: even in cases where internal debates existed and shaped the position of minority nationalist parties, the discursive output emanating from minority nationalist parties remained broadly consistent and was rarely contradicted from within.

Secondly, although internal debates frequently focus on questions of strategy and issue prioritising, there is little evidence, either here or in the literature, of internal pressures to abandon self-determination as a fundamental principle. While differing opinions exist on the extent to which self-determination should be pursued, and the forms this should take rhetorically and electorally, the potential for a fundamental shift in the normative underpinnings and stance of minority nationalist parties was understood to be minimal.

Finally, the thesis poses some questions as to the relevance of the distinction between external and internal factors affecting minority nationalist parties. Although not addressed significantly in this thesis, there is significant evidence in this thesis that minority nationalist party stances are strongly, and mostly, affected by external factors. It is likely, therefore, that internal divisions within a party emerge themselves because of differing interpretations of the

political, legal, and institutional framework within which these parties find themselves. In this case, internal factors are inherently tied, and subordinate, to broader external factors.

The question of the extent to which parties influence their own environment is less addressed in existing literature. While existing studies have argued, convincingly, that minority nationalist parties as political actors have often had little impact in major territorial reforms in various European states (Elias and Tronconi, 2011), the norm-centric approach adopted by this thesis provides a slightly different approach. Here, the potential normative success of minority nationalist parties, whether it is the broad acceptance of ‘peopleness’ or the acceptance of the legitimacy of decentralisation or devolution, or even the acceptance of the legitimacy of independence as a potential political option, is differentiated from their immediate influence on the environment in which they operate.

While, for instance, Massetti and Schakel (Massetti and Schakel, 2013) highlight the potential difficulties faced by minority nationalist parties following territorial reforms, this is still understood, from this thesis’ perspective, as a success: while minority nationalist parties are often not involved directly in the policy-making process reflecting their normative stances, the fact that these normative stances find themselves adopted by parties and governments not primarily focused on self-determination is, in many ways, a greater mark of influence and success than direct implementation through government power. A good example of this is also found in Hepburn’s study of the ‘failure’ of the *Partito Sardo d’Azione*, a major Sardinian nationalist party. One of the reasons highlighted to explain the electoral weakness and growing failure of the party is the adoption, by other competing parties, of similar territorial aims (Hepburn, 2009a). The adoption of territorial reform as a goal by other parties is, understood through the lens of this thesis, a fundamental evidence of success by the *Partito Sardo D’Azione*, even if this eventually is simultaneously an explanation for its relative and subsequent failure as political party.

Other examples of this are found throughout the thesis. While minority nationalists in Corsica have had little direct, policy-making impact in shaping the institutional framework in place currently in Corsica, very few studies neglect the fundamental normative influence these parties, and Corsican nationalism more broadly, has had in providing an incentive for the French government to consider these reforms. The broad adoption, within local political parties, of key Corsican nationalist proposals and demands reflects more a broad acceptance of

Corsican nationalist normative principles, rather than a ‘conversion’ to Corsican nationalism and to the centrality of self-determination by these political parties. While often connected, the electoral fortunes, and even the survival of minority nationalist parties in the long run, is not the primary way in which minority nationalist impact on their legal, institutional and normative framework is measured.

The study of the various avenues in which minority nationalist parties try to legitimise their demands also highlights a nuance between this thesis and existing academic literature. While the literature itself is broad and very diverse, and important body of work has emerged focusing on minority nationalist parties as electoral agents, drawing upon a well-established academic body of work focusing on party competition within democratic systems. Many of the existing works cited above adopt this position, studying the various ways in which minority nationalist parties strategize their participation in elections, with accession to government understood as their fundamental aim (see Zuber, 2012; Elias, 2018 for examples of this). As will be seen in chapter four of this thesis however, a norm-centric approach as adopted in this thesis presents democracy, and elections, as a means to an end, albeit a central one, rather than an end in itself for minority nationalist parties. Participation in elections here is understood as one of the most important ways in which minority nationalist parties can secure legitimacy for their demands in the face of opposition. Elections also inherently act as a measurement tool to assess the extent to which the norms put forward by minority nationalist parties are adopted by their local and state-wide electorates. In either case however, democracy is understood as a major source of legitimacy, rather than as the primary purpose, of minority nationalist parties as embodiments of broader minority nationalist movements in all three territories studied here.

All things considered, the approach adopted in this thesis differs from that adopted in existing literature. In most cases, differences are subtle, and the study conducted in this thesis is broadly compatible and complementary with the work carried out in existing academic literature on the subject of minority nationalist parties. What this thesis provides, however, is an additional avenue to study minority nationalist parties not just as political parties participating in elections, but as important norm entrepreneurs yielding a significant degree of normative influence in the domestic, and European spheres they find themselves in.

Methodologically, this thesis draws most of its empirical evidence and data from the analysis of minority nationalist party public discourse in all of its forms. While the use of discourse analysis is frequent within constructivist academic work (Klotz and Lynch, 2007), it also presents us with several advantages for this study, which will be detailed further in the second chapter. First and foremost, if we are to develop any kind of understanding as to ‘why’ minority nationalists act and ‘speak’ the way they do in response to political developments and within their respective political environments, it is essential to see exactly ‘what’ they are saying, both to analyse rhetoric itself but also to understand the type of actions these parties, as political agents, think they are undertaking. Understanding how minority nationalist parties navigate such a complex process requires us to focus on how these parties themselves, as political agents, understand these processes, their place and their ability to act within them and on them. Throughout this study, we provide an interpretation of their actions, whether these appear reasonable, rational and likely to succeed from the perspective of the central state and observers or not. Understanding why a minority nationalist party might, at any given time, consider a specific course of action over another, allows us to not only better understand what they hope to achieve, but also better understand why, in some cases, minority nationalist parties engage in behaviours and espouse rhetoric that appears counter-productive to the achievement of their aims.

Overall, minority nationalist parties, when in a position power, often have strong and lasting effects on the polity they represent. Understanding this, aside from the inherent rewards of understanding a major contemporary political phenomenon, can be beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, the framework developed here is well suited to understand the actions of most, if not all, minority nationalist parties, at the very least in Europe. Secondly, understanding the motivations and rationale behind minority nationalist party rhetoric and activity can provide a better understanding of the demands these parties, and the populations who vote for them, are formulating. This can help observers and policymakers alike engage more fruitfully with these major political actors. Finally, focusing on this process as a normative process encourages engagement with, rather than hostility towards, minority nationalist parties. Although demands for independence can, from the perspective of the public, emerge quite suddenly, the normative processes that lead minority nationalist parties to prefer such an option over alternatives are often very slow and rooted several decades, if not more, further in the past. Understanding what these motivations are, and what norms minority nationalist parties seek to establish through independence, can provide tools for policymakers to address, one way or the other, the

normative challenge presented by minority nationalism in a growing number of territories in Europe today.

While the framework developed here aims to be applicable to all minority nationalist parties at least within a European context, three specific cases were selected for this study: Catalonia, Scotland, and Corsica.

Case Selection

Catalonia, Scotland and Corsica are all territories with distinct cultural (and sometimes linguistic) identities, underpinning strong, minority nationalist political movements. While in many regions of Europe minority nationalism is embodied by peripheral micro-parties (Lynch, 1998), minority nationalist parties in Catalonia, Scotland and are all significant political forces at the scale of the territory they claim to represent (and, sometimes at the national scale, as in Catalonia) (Müller-Rommel, 1998, p. 20).

The emergence of these minority nationalist parties as primary political actors and forces within their respective political environment occurred in different ways across all three of our cases, and all three minority nationalist movements, although they all share the specificity of being major, if not primary political actors at the sub-national and even the national level (as far as agenda setting is concerned, at the very least), the historical trajectory these parties have followed to get to this point varies significantly across all three cases. However, despite the varying historical trajectories, the position these parties are currently in, in Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland, is unprecedented.

Modern Corsican nationalism can be traced back to the 1950s, and the emergence of a succession of relatively small regionalist or pro-autonomist groups such as the Front Regionaliste Corse (FRC) or Action Regionaliste Corse (ARC), often in response to specific political concerns such as the high cost of living, the management of French-Algerian ‘returnees’ following Algerian independence in 1962 or environmental concerns (Elias, 2008b; Poggioli, 2016). The occupation of a vineyard in Aleria, owned by a French-Algerian businessman, by members of the ARC looking to highlight what was perceived as structural unfairness in land ownership for Corsicans (Poggioli, 2016), is often considered the starting point of a decades-long violent campaign led by clandestine nationalist group *Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse* (FLNC). During the period of violent conflict, Corsican nationalism was broadly separated between a radical branch, supportive of violence and

independence, and a moderate branch, focused on electoral gains and greater autonomy for Corsica (Olivesi, 1998). This division continued to characterise Corsican minority nationalism throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and continues to be used frequently in academic literature to understand Corsican minority nationalism (Elias, 2008a; Hepburn and Elias, 2011).

However, several developments in recent years have led to a weakening of this division. Starting around 2011, minority nationalists in Corsica shifted their focus towards the construction of a '*prugettu cumunu*', or 'common project' around which a broad consensus could be reached between different nationalist factions and, eventually, political actors outside of what is commonly termed the 'mouvement national' or 'national movement' encompassing all nationalist political actors (Alta Frequenza, 2015e; Corse Matin, 2015).

This process was further bolstered by the FLNC's decision, in 2014, to cease all violent actions and to support the new consensus-building process initiated a few years before. A year later, the two major nationalist parties currently representing both 'sides' of the divide, *Femu a Corsica* (moderates) and *Corsica Libera* (radicals) joined forces in the second round of France's territorial elections in 2015 and secured an overall majority in the Corsican assembly, the representative body associated with the *Collectivité Territoriale de Corse*, Corsica's 'regional' government. Although divisions remain (and parties still refuse to consider merging or standing together in elections on a regular basis) (Mari, 2016), the consensus built around issues such as political amnesty, new planning rules and fiscal devolution for Corsica show that, if not completely obsolete, the clear divide between radical and moderate nationalists appears to be weakening.

From a movement characterised by severe division and a multiplicity of weak, and sometimes marginal political structures (Olivesi, 1998), Corsican nationalism today has emerged as a dominant political force within the island's politics (Poggioli, 2016). While the emergence of *Femu a Corsica* and *Corsica Libera* remains a relatively recent event and may prove to be as fleeting as many other attempts to embody Corsican nationalism's many nuances and factions into effective political parties, the commitment to electoral politics, followed by the unprecedented success in the 2015 elections followed by accession to government for the very first time, undoubtedly represents a potential critical juncture for Corsican nationalists. The presence of Corsican nationalists in sub-national government for the first time placed Corsican nationalist normative demands within the state-wide French political agenda, and

enabled Corsican nationalists to engage in a long, albeit unfruitful (at the time of writing) negotiated process in an attempt to secure further institutional change from the French government (Corse net Infos, 2016; France 3 Corse Via Stella, 2016). The level of public attention and central government engagement, which only occurred previously in Corsica as a result of significant waves of political violence (Hoffbauer, 2011), justifies understanding the Corsican election result of 2015 and subsequent exercise of government by Corsican nationalists as not just a historic success for minority nationalist parties, but also a wider critical juncture challenging the normative understandings underpinning France's identity and constitutional order.

Minority nationalism in Scotland, as embodied by the Scottish National Party (SNP), has also risen to significant political prominence in recent years following decades of gradual development and occasional setbacks. Originating from several nationalist organisations and founded in 1934, the SNP recorded its first significant political successes in Scotland as early as 1945 with the election of its first Member of Parliament (Thiec, 2017). Subsequent political success would only occur throughout the 1960s, during which the SNP established itself both as a significant political party within Scottish politics and as an electoral force. Despite this however, internal debates regarding the party's position on a wide range of issues, but most notably devolution in the late 1970s, prevented the SNP from being perceived as an ideologically coherent political force, leading to a period of stagnation in growth and electoral support throughout most of the 1980s, even leading some academics to begin discussing the 'decline' of the Scottish National Party over that period (Kauppi, 1982; Thiec, 2017).

The emergence of Alex Salmond as party leader throughout the 1990s, and the success of devolution in the 1997 referendum, marked the beginning of an upwards trend for the SNP which continues to this day. While the SNP gradually emerged as a significant political threat to the more established state-wide parties at the newly-created devolved level, the SNP's first major success can be dated back to 2007, a year of unprecedented success in local and Scottish parliamentary elections (Sutherland, 2012). The SNP's success in 2007, where it was able to establish a minority government after becoming the largest party in the Scottish Parliament by a single seat, was followed by further success in 2011 where the party secured an overall majority in the Scottish Parliament (Dardanelli and Mitchell, 2014). The SNP 2011 success marked the starting point of a political process and negotiation with the central UK government,

which culminated in the Edinburgh Agreement in 2012 (Guibernau, Rocher and Adam, 2014), which marked a joint commitment between the Scottish and UK governments to hold an independence referendum before the end of 2014. The SNP's victory in 2011 on a manifesto pledging an independence referendum, followed by the referendum itself in 2014, marked the first, clear normative critical juncture that the SNP was able to create, challenging established understandings of Scotland's constitutional, political and legal place in the United Kingdom.

Despite a narrow loss in the 2014 independence referendum, the SNP's electoral fortunes continued to grow, culminating in the SNP's dominance in Scottish parliamentary seats at the May 2015 United Kingdom general election (BBC News, 2015c). This electoral success, which it was able to leverage for a further negotiated process with the UK government starting with the Smith Commission reviewing existing devolution arrangements and establishing further devolution (Smith Commission, 2014; Page, 2015), has placed the SNP in a unique position of electoral and political strength, through which the SNP's normative preferences are almost always considered a major and legitimate part of public debate, and through which every electoral success appears to trigger, or at least create the potential for, an additional critical juncture putting into question the UK's constitutional arrangement and the place and status given to Scotland within it.

Catalan minority nationalist parties, on the other hand, have had a slightly different historical trajectory to the ones experienced by Corsican and Scottish minority nationalist parties. Unlike Corsican nationalism or the SNP, Catalan minority nationalist parties emerged as significant political and electoral forces soon after Spain's transition to democracy in the late 1970s, and have been in government for the majority of the years since the re-establishment of the Catalan *Generalitat* (government) in 1977 (Robles, 2016). In Catalonia, the minority nationalist movement is represented by two major strands: the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), a left-leaning political organisation that has historically supported independence for Catalonia, and a centre-right 'Catalanist' political tradition represented by the *Convergència i Unió* (CiU) political party and its most recent embodiment, the *Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català* (PDeCAT), which had until recently adopted a more moderate stance on the matter of independence (Keating, 2004; de Laguérie, 2014). In addition to these political parties, many observers and actors also highlight that Catalan nationalism is also embodied by several, significant civil society organisations such as the *Assemblea Nacional*

Catalana (ANC), which is often understood as the ideological ‘beating heart’ of Catalan nationalism (de Laguérie, 2014, Appendix A interview 8).

Although Catalan minority nationalist parties have enjoyed greater electoral success and significant influence throughout the past few decades, the current period, and the period analysed in this thesis, still represent a significant and historically unique normative ‘moment’ for minority nationalism in Catalonia, a moment which has led to the emergence of a number of significant critical junctures challenging the norms and rules underpinning Spain’s national constitutional order.

There are two major related ways in which recent years have represented a significant and unique period for Catalan minority nationalism. While much of the decades preceding the 2000s were characterised by broad popular and political acceptance of the practice of autonomy in Catalonia (Elias and Mees, 2017), the perceived refusal by the Spanish government of José M. Aznar from 2000 onwards to entertain further demands for greater autonomy for Catalonia began a slow shift in the CiU’s position from a pro-autonomist party to a pro-independence party (Guibernau, 2013; Elias and Mees, 2017). The rejection of a new Catalan Statute of Autonomy by the Spanish Constitutional Court in 2010, followed by an upsurge in popular support for Catalan independence (which, by most accounts, doubled up to between 45% and 55% in the years following 2010), convinced the CiU to adopt a clearer, pro-independence platform, leading to a split in the CiU along pro-independence lines in 2015 (de Laguérie, 2014; Nationalia, 2015).

As a result of the ideological realignment within Catalan nationalism, the period analysed in this thesis represents a unique period in recent Catalan political history, during which a succession of critical junctures occurred challenging the very normative basis of Spain’s constitutional order. These critical junctures have emerged in two significant ways: unilateral actions by minority nationalist parties in government, and an electoral success based on policy platforms that appeared incompatible with the normative framework underpinning Spain’s Constitution. The first significant critical juncture was driven by the unilateral conduct of an unofficial consultative referendum on independence in 2014, which yielded an 80.4% result in favour of Catalan independence. This consultation, although unofficial, paved the way for the pursuit of independence as the primary electoral goal of Catalan minority nationalist parties, united a single pro-independence banner (*Junts Pel Sí*) in the October 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections (*Junts Pel Sí*, 2015k, 2015m; Elias and Mees, 2017). The electoral

success of Junts Pel Si, which obtained an overall majority of seats in the Catalan Parliament (Vilaweb, 2015), and the subsequent commitment by all components of Junts Pel Si to actively pursue Catalan independence as a matter of Catalan government policy, provided another major critical juncture, during which the well-established constitutional order of the Spanish state as a ‘state of autonomies’ (Keating and Wilson, 2009) came under significant pressure and public scrutiny, both in Catalonia and across Spain. The process, which started following the electoral victory in 2015, culminated in the 2017 Catalan independence referendum crisis, during which minority nationalist parties in government sought to conduct an official independence referendum, which yielded over 90% in favour of independence in a context of significant tensions and extremely low turnout from anti-independence voters (Russel, Slawson and Greenfield, 2017). In an attempt to implement the referendum result, Catalan minority nationalists in government published an official declaration of independence, which was promptly rejected by the Spanish government and triggered the forceful dissolution of the Catalan government and assumption of temporary direct rule by the Spanish central government (Badcock and Crisp, 2017).

Despite strong, albeit varying electoral fortunes (Lynch and De Winter, 2008, pp. 595–603), minority nationalist parties such as the CiU coalition as well as the ERC have played a major part in Catalan (and sometimes Spanish) politics for a significant period of time. This, in many respects, places Catalan nationalism as the strongest, and perhaps longest-established, political and electoral force of the three minority nationalisms analysed in this thesis. However, the recent shift in public opinion in support of independence, as well as the convergence of both main minority nationalist parties in support of independence still means that despite the important position Catalan minority nationalist parties have occupied in regional and sometimes national politics in the previous decades, the period analysed in this thesis is a unique, historical, critical juncture for Catalan nationalism.

Aside from differing historical backgrounds, minority nationalist parties in each of the three territories have also developed different relationships with, and face different responses from the national governments under which they operate. In Scotland, the UK government has, in recent years, shown a degree of openness towards constitutional change in Scotland, creating the devolved Scottish parliament in 1998, allowing an independence referendum in 2014 and

proposing further devolution in the aftermath of the independence referendum (Scottish National Party, 2015k, 2015f). This openness, although often combined with a degree of hostility and opposition to the proposals and policy stances of the SNP, has enabled to SNP to actively push for significant political changes in Scotland, drawing upon the legitimacy afforded by electoral success in both UK-wide and Scottish elections.

Relations between minority nationalists and central government in Catalonia and Corsica however can broadly be characterised as hostile. Although Catalonia does indeed enjoy significant devolution through the Catalan *Generalitat*, the rejection of a new statute for Catalonia voted by the Catalan parliament by the Spanish Constitutional Tribunal in 2010 is broadly attributed to triggering a new wave of pro-independence support in Catalonia. This phenomenon was then further enhanced by the refusal of the Spanish government to hold an independence referendum, making the respect of democracy a key policy point and argument for minority nationalists going into the September 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections (Convergents - CDC, 2015f; Esquerra Republicana, 2015c, 2015j). The continued invalidation of several laws passed by the Catalan government, as well as indictments for ‘insubordination’ against several high profile Catalan elected officials, have continued to mar relations between the Spanish government and minority nationalists while crippling their ability to act in government (Ara.cat, 2016).

Relations between Corsican minority nationalists and the French government are similarly strained. Many of the core demands put forward by minority nationalists in recent years, such as making Corsican a co-official language in Corsica, creating a new fiscal status for the island or passing an amnesty law for FLNC militants imprisoned in France, have been firmly rejected by the French government (AFP, 2013)

Despite recent negotiations following the nationalist victory in the December 2015 elections, early optimism has been replaced by frustration and a growing sense of pessimism, even among leading minority nationalist representatives (Corse net Infos, 2016). Although several changes have been secured by minority nationalists, including the creation of a single-tier regional government for Corsica in 2018 (Corse Matin, 2016), many of the changes that have been accepted are deemed to fall far short of expectations.

Although, as detailed above, all three minority nationalist movements studied here have had different historical trajectories and face different domestic constraints on their political action rooted in different institutional frameworks and different levels of central government indifference or hostility, the period analysed here represents a key period for minority nationalist parties in Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland. The period analysed here is a period of unprecedented opportunity for minority nationalist movements to promote and to attempt to pursue aims and goals rooted in self-determination, even though these goals can take and have taken different forms depending on the institutional and historical context the parties operate in.

One of the main driving factors behind this unprecedented period of opportunity, and behind the unprecedented salience minority nationalist party issues and demands gained in public debate, is a series of significant electoral successes that was interpreted by minority nationalist parties, in large part, as a legitimising factor. While the driving factors behind these electoral successes are various (and many will be explored in the fourth chapter of this thesis), the legitimacy granted by the electoral process and the democratic support expressed by a majority of the voting population within the territories these parties claim to represent has given minority nationalist parties unprecedented confidence in the pursuit of self-determination, and unprecedented exposure through which these ideas could be communicated to the wider public and form part of the ‘legitimate’ political agenda within their respective states. Beyond this, the institutional legitimacy that results from minority nationalist party rule in regional institutions, coupled with the democratic legitimacy mentioned above, enabled minority nationalist parties to pursue their goals increasingly forcefully and, in some cases, unilaterally, as in the case of the Catalan independence referendum in 2017. This attempt by minority nationalist parties to create ‘critical junctures’, through which established constitutional orders and even understandings of identity are challenged and replaced, is one of the defining characteristics of all three minority nationalist movements in Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland in that period. Very few, if any, other minority nationalist movements in Europe were in a similar position during the period analysed, and the simultaneous nature of these challenges across the three cases analysed here provided a useful comparative perspective for the analysis conducted in this thesis.

Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland are all strong cases to help develop our theoretical framework. All three territories provide us with a fruitful political context, in which minority nationalist parties are, through their electoral successes and their position as major political actors within their given territory, able to act on their demands and their aspirations. Understanding how minority nationalist parties adapt to setbacks and successes, and how these affect their strategy and their rhetoric over time, is essential to provide a theoretical framework that allows for dynamic analysis, as opposed to providing a snapshot of minority nationalist party actions at any given point in time. The differences in political and historical context highlighted above allow us to isolate, in greater detail, the importance of self-determination as the central motivation behind minority nationalist party action and rhetoric regardless of domestic context, and how the historical and political context faced by each party affects the ways in which this central motivation is expressed and used.

To analyse all three cases, the decision was made in this thesis to develop a thematic analysis, as opposed to providing three, distinct chapters containing a comprehensive analysis of each of the three cases separately. One of the primary reasons was the cross-cutting nature of most, if not all, of the research questions detailed above. Although substantive empirical contributions to each of the three cases are an important outcome of this study, the three cases were primarily seen as the best cases to analyse broader questions that go beyond individual cases. Whether it is the centrality of self-determination (chapter 3), the pursuit of legitimacy and change through democratic processes (chapter 4) or the existence of the European political arena as an additional avenue for the pursuit of change for minority nationalist parties (chapter 5), all three cases contribute significantly to the answers this thesis provides. A thematic approach, focusing on self-determination, democracy and Europe was seen as the best way to draw from these cases to support the empirical and theoretical analysis conducted to provide answers to the research questions highlighted above. The thesis structure, which reflects the thematic nature of the analysis, is what we turn our attention to now.

Thesis structure

The first chapter of this thesis focuses on the development of the theoretical framework used to analyse the rhetoric, actions and strategy of minority nationalist parties. Drawing upon the social theory behind several bodies of ‘constructivist’ literature, the framework draws upon

notions of constructivist mutual constitution, agency, rules and norm diffusion to explain the complex context within which these parties operate, and the ways in which they interact with that context. Path dependence, a concept drawn from historical institutionalism, is also drawn upon to provide a counterpart to the slow, progressive change described by several constructivist academics. At critical junctures, entrenched norms are often suddenly thrown into question, leading to the emergence and potential adoption of previously ‘unthinkable’ norms and principles in response to a crisis or a new development.

The second chapter focuses on methodology. In this chapter, the data collection process through which most of the empirical data for this thesis was gathered is described in detail, as well as the rationale behind case selection and how this affected the data collection process.

The following two chapters, chapters three and four, focus on what is described above as the fundamental motivation of minority nationalist parties: self-determination. The third chapter focuses primarily on definitions of self-determination, and how these drive every aspect of minority nationalist party action and rhetoric. Identifying three major types of grievances displayed by parties in Catalonia, Scotland and Corsica, the chapter serves as the first application of the theoretical framework developed in the first chapter. While parties adopt very different kinds of demands and grievances, all these demands are rooted in the pursuit of ‘peopleness’, or recognition as a distinct ‘people’, a pre-requisite of self-determination as a right. The variations observed between cases, and the relation these variations have with the differing political context faced by respective political parties, highlight the impact the normative political environment can have on minority nationalist actions.

As described above, not only are minority nationalist parties impacted by their environment, they are also able to change their normative environment through their actions. Chapter four analyses the importance of democracy as a legitimising process for all minority nationalist parties, and the ways in which these parties assess democracy as the primary pathway for normative change in their favour. The chapter discusses limitations with that assessment and highlights the various ways in which it has impacted on the relationship between minority nationalist parties in government and their respective central governments.

Chapter five analyses an additional dimension that is of particular interest to minority nationalist parties: Europe. The chapter provides an overview of European-level institutions, and the various ways in which these parties have sought to take advantage of these institutions to challenge their respective central governments. The chapter assesses the extent to which

these attempts have been successful and discusses the relative importance of Europe as an additional source of political legitimacy for minority nationalists.

1. Constructivism: agency, rules, structure, mutual constitution.

As with most political actors, minority nationalist parties operate in a complex environment characterised by the presence of a multitude of relevant actors, institutions, laws and conventions. To understand how these actors, institutions, conventions and laws interact with each other and how they affect (and are affected) by the actions and rhetoric of minority nationalist parties, I draw heavily on the ‘social theory’ (Barnett, 2014) of constructivism, building upon the various in which this social theory is expressed in different fields of constructivist thought.

Before detailing the various conceptual tools I draw from constructivism for the purpose of this study, it is important to understand what exactly is understood as ‘constructivism’ in this thesis and how, if at all, it relates to the various approaches labelled as ‘constructivism’ that have emerged in a wide range of disciplines and areas of study. Constructivism as a theory used to analyse political phenomena is sometimes divided into two distinct forms of theory: first-order theories, which are described as theories that develop hypotheses about specific agents within specific structures, and second-order theories that underpin first-order theories by providing the conceptual tools, the ontological assumptions and the social theory to analyse agents and structures in the first place (Wendt, 1999). This chapter, and therefore this thesis, draws primarily from the latter to create a conceptual toolkit through which minority nationalist parties can be analysed. While much, if not all, of the literature drawn upon here does relate to first order theories in a variety of fields (most notably international relations), the contribution these theorists have made to their respective field of study is less relevant than the social theory, the second-order theory, upon which their ‘first order’ contributions were made.

Constructivism, with its focus on actions (Onuf, 1989, p. 36) and on the importance of the ‘social’ dimension of politics, provides the right tools to analyse whether minority nationalist party behaviour is rule-driven, and whether the rules that dictate political activity within the context of Western Europe (both within states and at a European level) affect the ways in which minority nationalist parties present, and pursue their aims. However, this is not a one-way process – with its emphasis on mutual constitution of structure and agency, constructivism enables us to analyse not only how current rules are influenced by the actions of minority nationalist parties, but also how long-standing rules and institutions can be

changed. To supplement constructivism, in the final section of this chapter, I also bring in two concepts from historical institutionalism, namely path dependence and critical junctures, to explain both the durability of established rules and institutions but also how minority nationalist parties can, through sudden, spectacular successes or thanks to external shocks, trigger periods of uncertainty and debate that can challenge even the most established rules and institutions that regulate the politics of western European states.

Drawing on such a framework is, as we have established in the introduction of this thesis, essential to understanding the potential motivations underpinning minority nationalist party demands and actions. Many of the fundamental demands put forward by minority nationalist parties in all three of the territories analysed here (and in many other cases) directly challenge sometimes firmly established constitutional, political, societal and international rules. Whether through a demand for independence or political autonomy, language recognition, and even in debates surrounding future membership of international organisations post-independence, minority nationalist parties frequently have to undermine and challenge constitutions, laws, and some well-established rules in the domestic and international spheres within which they operate to legitimate their proposals and ideas. This legitimisation, in the democratic societies analysed here, is essential for minority nationalist parties to accede to positions of power through which they can attempt to implement the ideas they put forward.

The creation of an analytical framework, drawing upon conceptual tools rooted in broader bodies of study, in line with much of the emerging practice in pre-existing literature on minority nationalist parties. There have been several attempts throughout the literature to draw upon empirical data to develop mid-level theories that are applicable to a broader range of cases. Elias, for instance, analyses the party ideology of the *Bloco Nacionalista Gallego* (BNG) and Plaid Cymru to suggest that nationalist parties develop policy platforms that move beyond strict territorial goals, an idea that is echoed in my own description of the variety of grievances that minority nationalist parties can put forward at any given time (Elias, 2009). In a similar study, Elias and Mees analyse the differing territorial goals put forward by Basque and Catalan minority nationalists, highlighting the central importance of the economic, political, constitutional and ideological constraints in shaping different territorial responses to similar problems across different minority nationalist parties (Elias and Mees, 2017). Other studies however, drawing from a broad body of work on party competition, have focused on developing, and subsequently testing, more extensive analytical frameworks in the form of conceptual toolboxes that enable us to analyse, and understand, minority nationalist party

behaviour more broadly. One of the most recent examples of this is the analytical framework developed by Elias, Szöcsik and Zuber (2015), which draws upon literature on party competition to theorise that minority nationalist parties, simultaneously operating on an economic and a territorial dimension, have various strategic options available to them including changes in their policy positioning, emphasising one dimension over the other, framing issues in terms of a given dimension, issue blurring and issue subsuming. Another attempt to create an analytical framework to understand an aspect of minority nationalist parties is the framework created by Elias and Tronconi to understand the impact of government exercise on minority nationalist parties (2011). The attempt presented in this thesis, rather than being specifically focused on building empirical knowledge or testing a pre-existing analytical framework, draws from a previously underutilised body of literature (constructivism and norm diffusion) to provide an alternative interpretive framework for the rhetoric, and actions of minority nationalist parties. Far from being a refutation of existing analytical frameworks, this framework seeks to provide an alternative analytical lens for the study of minority nationalist parties not fundamentally as political parties, but primarily as norm entrepreneurs and agents within an ongoing process of norm contestation and diffusion. While these two categorisations are in no way incompatible, analysing minority nationalist parties as norm entrepreneurs allows us to understand the normative impact of minority nationalist parties beyond strict electoral success, which is understood here as a means to an end, and beyond direct policy making. In other words, understanding minority nationalist parties as norm entrepreneurs allows us to see that parties as agents can succeed in norm diffusion while also, paradoxically, failing as office-seeking and election-winning political parties, something that can clearly be seen in Hepburn's analysis of the 'failure' of the *Partito Sardo d'Azione* in Sardinia (Hepburn, 2009a).

Although as we will see throughout the thesis, many of the empirical findings presented here correspond, in large part, to findings encountered in other analyses, the framework presented here does provide some important empirical nuances and provides a strong basis for further fruitful research.

Throughout this chapter, in addition to the theory, I include multiple brief examples drawn from the case studies analysed in this thesis. Rather than seeking to be exhaustive (many of the examples will be revisited further on in the thesis), these examples seek to show the extent to which this theoretical framework is applicable to an exploration of minority nationalist party-political action within the context of present-day western Europe.

In this chapter, I begin by providing an overview of structure and agency, two core concepts within constructivism. I then draw upon Nicholas Onuf's own understanding of constructivism to add an intermediate 'level' between structure and agency: rules. I then continue to analyse the main way in which rules and agency interact, namely mutual constitution. I then consider the various ways in which change has been theorised by constructivist academics. To supplement this, I introduce conceptual tools from the literature on norm diffusion, which I argue can be understood as one of the many expressions of constructivist social theory in political analysis. Finally, while much constructivist thought emphasises change as a slow, costly, and often difficult process, I draw upon concepts from historical institutionalism to explain how, in particular circumstances, processes of change can be dramatically accelerated by significant crises that undermine previously well-established rules and ideas.

Constructivism: agency, rules, structure, mutual constitution.

Agency

One of the common threads running through most, if not all, constructivist scholarship is the study of the 'mutual constitution' of agency and structure (Wendt, 1999, pp. 77–8; Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 3; Onuf, 2013, p. 6). Before describing, and assessing the idea of 'mutual constitution', it is important to provide a brief overview of the way agency and structure have been conceptualised and understood in constructivist scholarship, before assessing which, if any, approach is most suitable to analyse the political activity of minority nationalist parties in western Europe.

Throughout constructivist scholarship, agency has been understood to cover a wide range of actors within social contexts. On a basic level, an agent can be an individual – however, agency is not restricted to individuals. Nicholas Onuf, for instance, argues that agency can be held by institutions, while Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* relies on the idea that agency is held by states in the international system (Wendt, 1992, 1999; Onuf, 2013), similar breadth of agency can be found in the more practical applications of constructivism found within European studies. Aalberts, in her discussion on the continued relevance of sovereignty within the process of European integration, also grants agency to

individual states, while Risse, in his discussion on European identity, grants agency to individual citizens within European Union member states (Aalberts, 2005; Risse, 2009).

All individuals, however, are not simultaneously agents in all social contexts. According to Onuf, rules (a concept to which we will return in much greater detail further on) establish who is an active participant within a specific socio-political context (Onuf, 2013, p. 4). Agency can also be delegated by individuals to institutions or vice-versa (Onuf, 2013, p. 9). Zehfuss, in her critique of constructivism as developed by Wendt, argues that Wendt's constructivism takes agents as given, ignoring all the processes in which agents are constituted as relevant agents in the first place (Zehfuss, 2006, p. 112). Different social contexts constitute different individuals or institutions as agents.

Two further interrelated assumptions permeate constructivist scholarship with regards to agency: rationality, and goal-driven behaviour. Agents are assumed to always pursue their aims and are assumed to always act rationally to try and achieve their aims. This, in simple terms, means that agents, given a specific understanding of their goals and the context in which they must seek to achieve them, will attempt, relying on a cost-benefit analysis, to act in a way that helps them achieve those goals. However, this assumption of rationality must not be mistaken for an assumption of perfect information: agents do not always secure their preferred outcome. Agents act rationally within the parameters of the information they possess about their social and material conditions, and the notion of human fallibility is also accounted for to explain potentially unwanted, or imperfect, outcomes: parties in this case can misunderstand their position and make mistaken decisions (Wendt, 1999, pp. 181–182; Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 45; Onuf, 2013, p. 5). However, in the words of Onuf, human beings acting as agents always have 'goals in mind, even if we are not fully aware of them when we act' and 'agents do the best they can to achieve their goals with the means that nature and society (together – always together) make available to them' (Onuf, 2013, p. 5).

Aside from being central to much constructivist scholarship, these assumptions are similarly found across much of the literature on minority nationalist parties, whose political activity is often assumed to be carried out in pursuit of a set of goals (see Elias, 2008a or Sutherland, 2012 for examples of this). Rational, goal-driven behaviour, admittedly grounded in imperfect and incomplete understandings of an agent's social and material circumstances,

provides a strong enough basis on which to understand the political activity of minority nationalist parties.

This assumption of rationality, however, must be qualified. Assuming that political actors act rationally in pursuit of a goal does not imply, in any case, that the goals themselves are rational or perceived as rational by all. Accusations of irrationality are, to varying degrees, frequently part of the discourse put forward by opponents of minority nationalist parties (Maddox, 2014; Amaro and Bercetche, 2017). Academics such as Closs Stephens also for instance highlight the importance of understanding nationalism as an ‘affective atmosphere’, with nationality ‘often – if not mostly – experienced as a feeling’ through varieties of events, activities and cultural or linguistic bonds (Closs Stephens, 2016). This is particularly evident in the rhetoric of minority nationalists in Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland, for which sport, language, music, ‘the land’ and other cultural practices all connect to create a strong feeling of ‘otherness’ with regards to the culture of the overarching state (France, Spain or the United Kingdom), as well as a strong bond between ‘Catalans’, ‘Scots’ or ‘Corsicans’. Politicising this feeling of shared distinct nationality, as we will see in the following, is fundamental to everything minority nationalist parties seek to achieve. This potential ‘irrationality’ of nationalist sentiment however does not preclude a rational approach to the pursuit of minority nationalist party goals. For instance, as we will see many times throughout the following chapters, minority nationalist political failures (imperfect outcomes) can convincingly be understood as ‘rational decisions gone wrong’: rational decisions carried out with incomplete, and perhaps with hindsight erroneous, beliefs and understandings about the social circumstances within which these parties operate. As we will see, both Catalan and Scottish attempts at securing an independence referendum from 2016 onwards are good examples of this.

Finally, as we have seen above agency can also be ascribed beyond individuals to institutions, groups, bodies of people. In this study, my focus on political parties as ‘single’ agents, as opposed to being a collection of distinct individual agents represented by party leaders and officials, means that the notion of ‘corporate’ agency (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 67), a notion compared to the ‘commonplace acceptance’ of corporate personality by constructivist author Kratochwil (2006, p. 30) is central to my purpose here. Treating minority nationalist parties as unitary entities, as opposed to collections of individuals, allows us to

ascribe specific examples of rhetoric and strategy to a single party and therefore a single agent – allowing us to avoid an unnecessary analysis of the individual rhetoric and strategic preferences of individual party leaders. Aside from practical aspects, very little in my own analysis of minority nationalist party rhetoric in Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland warranted the establishment of a clear distinction between individual party leaders as separate, although interrelated, agents. The treatment of political parties as single unitary agents is also a common, albeit untheorised, practice throughout the literature on minority nationalist parties (Lynch, 1996; de Winter and Türsan, 1998; Müller-Rommel, 1998).

This, however, does not mean excluding, or denying the importance of, internal policy discussions within political parties or the importance of individual, charismatic leaders or party officials in determining the overall positioning of a given political party over time. Instead, this study focuses on what is considered to be the ‘second’ stage in a two-stage process: firstly, policy ideas emerge from internal debates, or from the efforts of individual leaders within parties. Secondly, policies are then adopted as party policy, and political parties then, understood as a unitary agent, attempt to implement these policies. This study focuses primarily on the latter stage: what occurs once a policy is adopted by a party, how its legitimacy from the perspective of the parties can be understood, and how they use various avenues to try and implement that policy within their political environment. This allows us to focus on how party actions and rhetoric impact on the broader political environment within which they operate, rather than on the exact processes through which a given policy is adopted by the party.

Rules and/or norms?

Rules are undoubtedly the single, most significant concept in Onuf’s constructivism. Onuf defines rules as: ‘statements that tell people what we should do’ (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 4). As statements dictating what one ‘should’ do, rules are also often paired with consequences for ignoring, or deliberately violating, a given rule: if an agent fails to follow a rule, Onuf argues that this agent can ‘expect consequences some other rule will bring into effect when other people follow the rule calling for such consequences’ (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 4). In other words rules, according to Onuf, carry with them consequences for agents that fail to follow them – consequences that are then implemented by other agents following a rule that legitimises the enforcement of the rule that the first agent failed to follow. Consequences however, are not

inherently coercive, and rules do not always result in coercively impossible obligations for agents (Onuf, 1989, p. 204). In many cases, consequences for ignoring a given rule can result in various degrees of shunning or exclusion, or in the event of interpersonal rules can result in mockery or ridicule.

Beyond the definition provided by Onuf above, rules play an important role throughout Onuf's constructivist theory. Drawing from Wittgenstein's own work on the rule-governed nature of language, Onuf argues that many social theorists, including himself, have expanded this notion and argued that all social activity is rule-governed (Onuf, 1989, p. 49). This gives rules a very broad role in Onuf's own understanding of structure and its relation to agency. Rules, first and foremost, establish who is an agent in society in a given context – they give agents choices, either on behalf of themselves or on behalf of institutions or other social constructions (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, pp. 4–5). In that respect, rules enable and facilitate rational, goal-driven behaviour. According to Onuf, agents adhere to rules in the belief that it will help them achieve their goals; rules enable agents to act in the world, and make resources available for agents' use in pursuing their goals (Onuf, 2013, pp. 5–8). Beyond this, and perhaps more fundamentally, Onuf argues that rules establish which means and ends are legitimate, providing a choice to agents in the form of a simple follow or transgress dichotomy. The consequences of transgression, as we have seen above, usually clear to the agent in question (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, pp. 5, 10).

For Onuf, all rules simultaneously have a constitutive and a regulative effect (Onuf, 1989, p. 52). One way to illustrate this would be to briefly take an example from one of the cases analysed in this study. If we take, for example, a rule that we can state as 'targeted political violence is a legitimate tool of political activity'. This rule which underpinned much of the political violence witnessed in Corsica throughout the latter part of the twentieth century (Olivesi, 1998), is seen to have both regulative and constitutive effects. It legitimised very specific, targeted political violence as a political activity carried out by sections of the Corsican nationalist movement (and prohibited broader mass-casualty violence) (Olivesi, 1998), while constituting, for instance, the category of 'political prisoners', which is central to the rhetoric of Corsican nationalist parties and has enabled, and legitimised, political agency from organisations representing the interests of these prisoners and their families (Sulidarità, 2016). This brief example shows how a rule can constitute relevant agents, namely violent political activists (and, upon arrest, 'political prisoners') and the organisations acting on their behalf, while regulating the behaviour of these agents to a certain extent.

In order to have the influence and the role described above, Onuf argues that all rules are rooted in language and must therefore, in principle, be either stated or, if they are not, a statement of them must be possible (Onuf, 1989, p. 79). The importance of language in Onuf's characterisation of rules does not end here. Drawing from speech act theory, Onuf establishes what he terms an 'inclusive classificatory scheme for all social rules' (Onuf, 1989, p. 91). The three categories of rules established by Onuf are instruction-rules, directive-rules and commitment-rules (Onuf, 1989, p. 87; Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 11).

Firstly, instruction-rules are rooted in assertive speech acts. Onuf defines these as statements of belief intended to be accepted (Onuf, 1989, p. 87). The instruction-rule which emerges from such a speech act provides agents with information on adequate courses of action. Onuf notably includes principles within his category of instruction-rule (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 11). An example of such a rule could be, for instance, the rule stated above in the example regarding political violence in Corsica. 'Targeted political violence is a legitimate tool of political activity' is an excellent example of a statement of belief intended to be accepted by the hearer, providing information on adequate courses of action to agents.

Secondly, directive-rules are rooted, according to Onuf, in directive speech acts. Directive speech acts are defined as statements putting forward, for the attention of the hearer, the intention of the speaker with regards to an action the speaker would like to see realised. The directive-rules that stem from such speech acts are understood to be clear normative statements, often with a clear statement of consequences for transgression (Onuf, 1989, p. 87; Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 11). In keeping with the examples used above, a good example of a directive-rule in the context of this study would be 'do not engage in political violence', a clear normative statement which prohibits the use of political violence with, if we explicitly state the implied '... or you will be arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned', a clear statement of consequences for transgression.

Finally, commitment-rules are rooted in commissive speech acts. These speech acts present to the hearer the speaker's intention of committing himself to an action. Commitment-rules, therefore, are best described as promises which commit agents to (reciprocated) actions towards other agents, something exemplified for instance in the notion of rights and duties (Onuf, 1989, p. 87; Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 12).

Again, to continue within the theme developed in previous examples, a commitment-rule can be inferred directly from the statement by Corsican nationalist paramilitary group

Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse (FLNC). In a statement announcing the end of the group's violent campaign, the group stated that it 'unilaterally began a demilitarisation process and a gradual end to the group's clandestine actions'. (Corsica Infurmazione, 2014). As a result of this statement, the group *committed* to a rule that can be stated as: 'we commit to ending the use of political violence'. Further in the statement, this commitment to ending political violence is made with the understanding that this draws a commitment from another agent, in this case the French Government, to allow for a political discussion on Corsican nationalist demands.

As a final comment on rules, it is important to note that all three categories of speech acts are understood to interact and reinforce each other in the production of rules. Rules also vary in the extent of their formality, and are often linked with each other in both content & function – not least when certain rules are established to support and enforce other rules (as described at the beginning of this section)(Onuf *et al.*, 2013). These points, although briefly described, are an important part of the way in which the concept of rules is understood, and then applied, in this thesis.

Onuf's conceptualisation of rules already provides significant tools for the analysis of minority nationalist party activity and rhetoric. However, other bodies of academic literature have drawn on very similar ideas to develop further, now widespread, concepts. The most important of those is the literature on norm diffusion, which, as we will see, draws on constructivism and the concepts explained above to create a mid-level theory on creation, diffusion and acceptance of norms across space and time.

Academics working with the concepts of norms and norm diffusion have applied these to a wide range of fields. International relations is one of the fields in which norms, norm creation and norm diffusion has been used most widely, notably to understand how international norms (such as a prohibition on torture or chemical weapons usage) are created, adopted, and sometimes contested by states (the agents of the international system). Examples of this work include studies on the Responsibility To Protect (R2P) concept (Acharya, 2013), the normative power of ASEAN (Allison-Reumann, 2017) and a very broad literature on the normative power of the European Union (to which we will return in more detail below). However, international relations is not the only domain in which these concepts have been used fruitfully to analyse policy decisions and norms. Studies of domestic politics drawing upon norm diffusion have included a study of the different stances adopted by Turkish parties in

relation to the issue of EU accession (Baudner, 2012), a study on the impact of policy entrepreneurs during the nuclear weapons test ban debate in the United States in the early days of the Cold War (Macdonald, 2015) and a study on political participation on university campuses (Shulman and Levine, 2012). Norms and norm diffusion have also been called upon to analyse lower-level phenomena within individuals and society, analysing the emergence of trends, social conventions within societies and among communities (Bicchieri, 2005).

Unsurprisingly, the different areas in which norms and norm diffusion have been used for analysis mean that giving a simple, self-contained definition of norms is a difficult task. Bicchieri, for instance, defines norms as ‘a variety of behaviours and accompanying expectations’ that only truly exist when a sufficient number of people adopt the norm and perceive it as ‘pertaining to a given type of situation’, which leads to varying degrees of compliance to the norm (Bicchieri, 2005). More importantly, Bicchieri creates a clear distinction between *norms* and *codified* rules, while rules are always enforced, informal norms need not be (Bicchieri, 2005). On a more detailed level, Bicchieri describes three kinds of norms: descriptive norms, who are often short-lived and require a perception of widespread adoption within a relevant social group to encourage actors to adopt them (fashions, fads, trends fall under this category). A second type, conventions, emerge when expectations about conformity crystallise sufficiently to create a belief among actors that conformity is not only a given from other actors but also strongly expected of themselves by other actors. Under this category, Bicchieri places norms such as rules of etiquette or signalling systems (Bicchieri, 2005).

Finally, the third type of norm introduced by Bicchieri are social norms. While similar to conventions in that they entail a strong expectation of conformity on behalf of other actors, social norms also include a normative dimension: they ‘prescribe or proscribe behaviour; they entail obligations and are supported by normative expectations. Not only do we expect others to conform to a social norm; we are also aware that we are expected to conform’ (Bicchieri, 2005).

Bicchieri’s understanding of norms as briefly described here appears particularly relevant to the analysis of informal norms as applied and perceived by individuals and smaller social groups within a given society. However, there are several limitations here for the use of this approach in the context of minority nationalist parties. Firstly, it is unlikely that descriptive norms and even conventions fundamentally affect the core ideology of a given party – while

conventions can strongly shape the way in which parties and their representatives act in a given, convention-heavy political environment (such as parliaments), there is little evidence to suspect that the fundamental ideology and policy platform of a given party is significantly, if at all, shaped by conventions or descriptive norms.

The notion of expected conformity and the clear distinction between social norms as informal norms and codified *rules* are equally problematic. In the context of this analysis, while minority nationalist parties adhere to norms and believe that they and others *should* behave in the way prescribed by the norm, the conflictual nature of the politics they frequently engage in means that often, there is no *expectation* of conformity on behalf of other relevant agents within the political sphere. While the vocabulary of expectation can be used to delegitimise the position of political opponents, this is frequently paired up with a clear expectation of *non-conformity* from other agents. An example of this is the notion of political involvement of governing minority nationalist parties in a negotiated process with the central government. While no codified rule exists in France or the United Kingdom for the involvement of sub-national governments in major decisions such as the UK's post European Union membership relationship or on the regional status of Corsica, minority nationalist parties in government have frequently formulated a normative position according to which they *ought* to be participating in discussions with the central government and be a part of the decision-making process as equal partners. While the notion of expectation is used in discourse to delegitimise central government opposition to such a norm, this does not mean that minority nationalist parties *expect* central government to agree – in most cases, the contrary is true.

However, rather than flaws in Bicchieri's approach to norms, the difficulties can be understood as a 'fit' problem between Bicchieri's object of study and mine. Within a given society, where frequently groups of individuals often adhere and sometimes congregate around the same norms (sub-cultures are a strong example of this), the approach to norms described by Bicchieri applies well. While there might not be an expectation of conformity across all individuals in society, at the very least within the social group that has adopted a given norm such an expectation can exist. However, problems arise when a single individual adopts a norm – in this case, no such expectation of conformity is possible. In our case, because we understand a political party to be a single agent, parties can find themselves in a far more conflictual and isolated normative environment than an individual within a social group.

Similarly, established norms as defined by Bicchieri frequently do not regularly appear in the discourse of political parties. Political parties, by virtue of their pursuit of change (to varying degrees), often emphasise non-established norms in their political discourse. As we will see in the case of language, issues on which there is an almost complete normative consensus often fade into a secondary position within minority nationalist party rhetoric, while conflictual issues often find themselves at the forefront.

The study of norms and norm diffusion within the international system can provide a different perspective on norms as applied to ‘collective’ agents such as states. In a seminal article from 1998, Finnemore and Sikkink set out many of the fundamental building blocks for a norm-driven research agenda in international relations. Finnemore and Sikkink identify three types of norms as described in the norm diffusion academic literature: regulative norms, that constrain behaviour, constitutive norms, that establish new actors or interests, and prescriptive norms that establish what is considered as ‘appropriate’ behaviour (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). While, broadly, regulative norms are similar to those described by Bicchieri, it is the addition of constitutive and prescriptive norms that is of particular interest for this thesis. Both echo many of the characteristics attributed to rules by Nicholas Onuf, where rules establish what an agent *ought* to do, prescriptive norms fulfil a similar role; where rules can establish who is a relevant agent – and, through the process of mutual constitution, help shape what interests and what identity a given agent will adopt. Constitutive norms again fulfil a similar role. Both constitutive and prescriptive norms are central to the contestation between minority nationalist parties and other relevant political agents: as we will see across this thesis, fundamental disagreements often focus on what minority nationalist parties in government represent (constitutive question) and what legitimate behaviours and decision stem from this (prescriptive question).

Both the similarities between Onuf’s approach to rules, and the characteristics of norms as defined in parts of the norm diffusion literature, as well as the clear dichotomy that arises in that literature between informal *norms* and *codified* rules require to address an important question before proceeding: are norms and rules the same?

Are norms and rules the same?

With both literatures using different terminologies to describe the ‘things’ that regulate or shape social life, the extent to which the concept of ‘rules’ and ‘norms’ differ will affect our

ability to combine the insights from both rules-centred constructivism and norm diffusion into a single explanatory framework shedding light upon what regulates behaviour or actions and how these regulations both constrain, and are shaped by, an agent's actions (establishing mutual constitution between agents and the rules or norms that shape their behaviour).

As we have seen above, different studies address different types of norms, from the almost inter-personal behavioural norms discussed by Bicchieri (Bicchieri, 2005) to the international, global norms analysed by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998). However, regardless of the 'level' at which these norms are identified and operate, and despite a great analytical variety and complexity in the different ways in which norms are perceived to impact human behaviour, in most cases norms as understood in the norm diffusion literature can be understood exactly in the same terms as Onuf's definition of rules: statements about what one should do (Onuf, 1989). However, in many cases, the 'rules' terminology is frequently used to describe a very explicit kind of legal rule, as set out in laws, constitutions, treaties.

While the difference between 'norms' and 'rules' appears to be semantic rather than substantial, in the case of this analysis there is significant value in using both terms in a similar way to what is encountered in some of the norm diffusion literature. By restricting the use of 'rules' to legal, codified rules as opposed to simple 'statements about what one should do', one can differentiate the 'norm', as it exists, grows and is contested within society, and 'rules', as expressed in legal and constitutional frameworks both domestically and internationally. In cases where the societal norm matches the legal rule, this is relatively unproblematic, and at best the rule and the norm can be seen as reinforcing each other. An example of this for instance would be the use of political violence in Corsica. By describing Corsican political violence as simply 'crime' and refusing to recognise any kind of political justification for it, the French government was able, by drawing on both legal rules prohibiting violent crime and widespread societal support for the norm prohibiting violent crime, to discredit the actions of Corsican minority nationalists as entirely illegitimate in the eyes of French society, to the extent that the 'violent' stereotype attributed to Corsican nationalists remains far stronger in French national political discourse than any discussion of the actual political motivations that arguably led to the violence in the first place (see, for instance, the tendency to portray Corsicans as balaclava-wearing 'terrorists' in French satirical drawings (Corse Matin, 2017)).

However, it is far more frequent for minority nationalist parties in Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland to promote policies and act in areas in which the norm they, in some cases, have

successfully established within the political society of their respective territories, clashes with legal and constitutional rules established at the central government level. The importance of creating a distinction between norms and rules becomes clear when we look at two concrete examples: the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, and the Catalan referendum in 2017.

The Edinburgh Agreement in 2012, which created the legal basis for the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, can be understood as an example of legislation (legal rules) being brought in to match a strong societal norm (Page, 2015). The Scottish National Party, through its long-standing commitment to the promotion of Scottish independence as a viable and legitimate political alternative for Scotland, has continuously attempted to promote and establish a norm in Scottish political society which can be stated in these terms:

‘It is legitimate for Scotland to become an independent country if a majority of Scots express a wish for this to happen’.

Following the success of the SNP in the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary elections having stood on a clear pro-independence platform (Scottish National Party, 2011), the SNP argued that the above norm had become accepted by a majority of the Scottish electorate. With the norm gaining further legitimacy through its apparent majority support within the electorate, the British Government began a negotiation process, of which the Edinburgh Agreement was the primary output, to provide a legal basis for the expression of that political norm through an independence referendum; the assumption being that, if independence is a legitimate option, then asking the Scottish electorate about it is equally legitimate.

In the case of Catalonia, the gap between societal norms and legal rules is equally important in explaining the ongoing crisis and tensions between the Catalan minority nationalist government and the Spanish central government. While Catalan minority nationalist parties and organisations have successfully established majority support in Catalonia for a norm almost identical to the one stated above for Scotland, the Spanish government’s response has focused on emphasising the impossibility of independence and independence referendums within the legal, constitutional framework of the Spanish state. It argues both that independence is fundamentally illegitimate insofar as Spain is a united, indivisible nation, and that an independence referendum in a single region of Spain cannot be legitimate for a number of legal reasons, including the notion that, with sovereignty resting with the Spanish people as a whole, a subsection of that people cannot decide on such a matter (Comella, 2014).

Whether the outcome is conciliatory, or leads to significant tensions and crises, the potential for a gap to exist between norms with strong social implantations and legal rules warrants the dichotomy between these two terms. While this strays somewhat from Onuf's own understanding of rules, the similarities in the ways norms and rules are understood in academic literature allows us to continue drawing upon the concept of 'rules' as described by Onuf, albeit with the different terminology used in norm diffusion literature.

Structure

Although the vocabulary used differs across constructivist authors, all tend to see structure in a similar way. Klotz and Lynch, in a heavily discursive approach to constructivism, describe 'dominant meanings' as being the foundation of structure (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 7). Alexander Wendt defines structure as being composed of three key elements: material conditions, interests and ideas (Wendt, 1999, p. 139). In addition to these three elements, Wendt highlights two types, or levels of structure: micro and a macro level. According to Wendt, the micro level focuses notably on interaction between agents within a structure, explaining the behaviour of individual agents as well as overall outcomes from these interactions (Wendt, 1999, pp. 147–150). On the other hand, the macro-level of analysis of structure does not seek to explain the behaviour of individual agents but instead focuses on overall outcomes that cannot be reduced to the actions of specific agents. To illustrate what he means by macro-level structures, Wendt uses the example of the neorealist scholar Waltz, who argues that both the balance of power and the functional similarity between states cannot be explained by looking at the specific attributes or interactions of agents (Wendt, 1999, pp. 151–152).

According to Wendt, the relationship between these two levels of structure is one of supervenience, which he defines in this way:

It describes a non-causal, non-reductive relationship of ontological dependency of one class of facts on another (mental on physical, social on individual, etc.). It comes in various forms, but, in each form, one class of facts (macro) is said to "supervene" on another class of facts (micro) when sameness with respects to micro-states entails sameness with respect to macro-states. (Wendt, 1999, p. 156).

In other words, if one assumes two structures with identical micro-level elements, one can safely say that the macro elements of these two structures will also be identical. Macro-level

structure here depends on micro-level structure but cannot be reduced to it (Wendt, 1999, p. 156). It is important however to note that the definition of supervenience does not imply that this relationship functions both ways. To re-use Wendt's words, he argues that sameness with respect to macro-structures does not entail sameness with respect to micro-structures. This concept, which he names 'multiple realizability', establishes that similar macro-level structures can be achieved through different micro-level structural elements (Wendt, 1999, p. 154).

This approach, however, is unsatisfactory for our purposes. Wendt's preference for macro-structural focus, rooted in his attempt to create a systemic theory of international relations, neglects the micro-level structure. His definitional statement of micro-structure is remarkably close to what this project is seeking to explore: the behaviour of individual minority nationalist parties and the structural outcomes of these behaviours. However, although Wendt's approach is potentially well suited to an analysis of an international system whose characteristics cannot be simply reduced to the actions of actors within it, Onuf's understanding of structure, and his broader constructivism rooted in social theory, provides some of the tools needed to lead a fruitful analysis of the behaviour, rhetoric and aims of minority nationalist parties in relation not just to the political context in which they operate, but in relation to other agents within the same 'structure'.

Nicholas Onuf defines structure as being a 'stable pattern of institutions, rules, and unintended consequences' (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 6). In my attempt to develop a micro-level understanding of structure that would help us to understand the context in which minority nationalist parties act, a closer analysis of all three of these elements, as well as the ways in which they will contribute to the theoretical framework of this project, is warranted.

In addition to rules, described above, the two other elements of structure proposed by Onuf, institutions and unintended consequences, are also worthy of a brief overview. Firstly, I argue that Onuf's inclusion of unintended consequences as an element of structure is merely a logical consequence of both the (imperfect) rationality assumption inherent to much of constructivism and of the core idea of mutual constitution. If indeed, agency and structure are 'mutually constituted' and agents are able to bring about unintended outcomes through imperfect understandings of their social and material conditions, it is logical that these unintended consequences brought about by agents would proceed to form a part of the structure in which agents operate.

Institutions, on the other hand, are also important to both Onuf's theory and this thesis' theoretical framework. Institutions are defined by Onuf as stable patterns of rules and practices suiting agents' intentions, with 'practices' understood as 'all of the ways in which people deal with rules – whether we follow the rules or break them, whether we make the rules, change them or get rid of them' (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, pp. 4–5). Aside from the broad definition provided above, Onuf further refines his understanding of institutions, describing them as being formed by 'families of rules and related practices' (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 13). Rules themselves can be institutionalised, limiting their exercise to a few agents tasked with enforcing and implementing the rules (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 18). In practical terms, Onuf's understanding of institutions covers a very broad range of possible entities. From what he terms 'cognitive universals' such as methods of reasoning like deduction and induction to what is more commonly understood as institutions such as the institutions of the state (see chapter 3 in Onuf, 1989).

Although Nicholas Onuf does apply his theory of rules primarily to methods of reasoning, or activities, that have shaped and defined human behaviour across all times and places, his definition of rules and institutions, and the way in which they are theorised in his work, enables us to look not only at what he calls 'cognitive universals', but also at rules and institutions regulating the behaviour of specific agents in a particular spatiotemporal and sociopolitical context. This reasoning is echoed by Klotz and Lynch in their practical guide to constructivist research, arguing that although rules and institutions are all part of what is termed 'structure', they can be understood as different levels of analysis and different degrees of aggregation (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 25). Although the approach taken by Klotz and Lynch does seem to lead to a clearer separation between structure, rules, and institutions as opposed to understanding rules and institutions as categories of structure, Onuf's approach does allow for more detailed, small-scale, context specific analyses.

Two examples can be brought forward here to highlight the impact of rules and institutions on the political activities of minority nationalist parties. In both France and Spain, constitutional rules, which fundamentally set what is deemed to be possible and legitimate in terms of political action within the boundaries of the state, are a significant obstacle to some of the core demands put forward by minority nationalist parties in Catalonia and Corsica. In the case of Catalan nationalist parties, their demand for independence is rendered unconstitutional and therefore 'illegitimate' (in terms of what is allowed by the Spanish constitution as a body of rules regulating political activity within Spain) by article 2 of the Spanish constitution, that sets out the 'indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, shared and indivisible homeland of all

Spaniards’ (Cortes Generales, 2011). A similar notion is present in the French constitution, covering not only political indivisibility but also linguistic indivisibility, with article 2 stating ‘the language of the Republic is French’ (Assemblée Nationale, 2017). In both cases, (constitutional) rules appear to contradict, and therefore render illegitimate, some of the core demands of minority nationalist parties, whether that be political independence in Catalonia or linguistic recognition in Corsica, for instance. In this case, the constitutional document and its rules, the agents tasked with enforcement as well as the ways in which most other national parties (and the electorate) understand the importance and centrality of ‘the Constitution’ all form part of an ‘institution’ understood in Onuf’s terms against which minority nationalist parties find themselves in opposition through their aims and actions. In both Catalonia and Corsica, constitutional discussions, reform and interactions with the constitutional courts consequently occupy a major place in the rhetoric and political activity of minority nationalist parties (Guibernau, 2013; Emmanuelli, 2015). In comparison, the lack of formal, legal, institutionalised constitutional rules in the United Kingdom can be seen to have facilitated both the holding of the 2014 independence referendum and subsequent attempts at further devolution for Scotland.

The conceptualisation of agency and structure put forward by constructivism, notably that of Nicholas Onuf, provides a clear and fruitful theoretical framework to analyse both the activity and the interconnectedness of minority nationalist parties in Western Europe. However, constructivism cannot be fully understood, and its potential fully appreciated, without an understanding of the key concept at the heart of most, if not all constructivist thought: that of ‘mutual constitution’.

The concept of ‘mutual constitution’.

Although there are few succinct definitions, an overview of the way in which different constructivists understand the effects of mutual constitution provides a good starting point to understand the importance of the concept in constructivist thought. A description of what that process entails is provided by Risse:

The social environment in which we find ourselves, defines (constitutes) who we are, our identities as social beings. “We” are social beings, embedded in various relevant

social communities. At the same time, human agency creates, reproduces, and changes culture through our daily practices (2009, pp. 145–6).

Wendt, in his own discussion on the constitutive effects of structure, introduces the dichotomy between internalist and externalist philosophies of the mind. This allows us to further understand what is meant, in practice, by mutual constitution. According to him, internalist philosophies of the mind broadly argue, according to Wendt, that because individuals have privileged access to their thoughts, it is those thoughts that matter primarily when trying to explain agent actions (Wendt, 1999, p. 173). On the other hand, externalist philosophies of the mind argue that the content of some mental states is constituted by factors external to the mind. Meanings depend on practices and are communally set, rather than individually held. Applied to his primary discipline, Wendt highlights legitimacy in international relations as an example of structure impacting agency. According to Wendt, two international systems with the same beliefs can follow different courses of action if legitimacy, and what is and is not legitimate, is understood (or constituted) differently at the structural level (Wendt, 1999, pp. 176–178). Another important illustration of the concept of mutual constitution found in Wendt's work is perhaps the sentence for which Wendt is most known in international relations: 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt, 1992). In this particular sentence we clearly see the idea that anarchy, a structural feature, is constituted by the agents within the system, in this case states.

In addition to these considerations on mutual constitution, Wendt's approach allows us to address the issue of causality within constructivist thought. Constructivism, by having 'mutual constitution' of agency and structure as a core concept, enables us to analyse constitutive relationships in addition to the causal relationships central to rationalist and individualist approaches in mainstream international relations and social science as a whole. This contribution is recognised by Wendt, who then proceeds to describe the difference between causal and constitutive relationships (1999, pp. 165–178).

According to Wendt, for a causal relationship between structure and agency to be possible, the two must be conceptually independent, something which Wendt later describes as a relationship of co-determination (Wendt, 1999, p. 180). Constitutive relationships between agency and structure are described by Wendt as being based on meanings, perceptions that make certain actors possible. Wendt uses the example of 'doctor' and argues that the meanings underpinning the categorisation of 'doctor' define what agents are when they 'are doctors'. In other words, the meanings that underpin 'doctor' as a social category do not cause the existence

of ‘doctors’, but make it possible instead (Wendt, 1999). Wendt and other constructivist scholars often summarise the difference between causal and constitutive relationships as a difference in the type of questions asked: a causal analysis answers the question “how?” whereas a constitutive analysis focuses on “how-possible?” and “what?” questions (Wendt, 1999, pp. 77–8). It seems however, drawing from the ‘doctor’ example, that constitutive relationships violate the requirement of conceptual and logical independence central to causality.

In the course of his analysis, Wendt does indeed highlight that the conceptual independence required for causal relationships inherently prevents the possibility of constitutive relationships, which backs the argument that constitutive and causal relationships between agency and structure cannot overlap or co-exist (Wendt, 1999, p. 169). Wendt however, develops a different position which allows for both causal and constitutive relationships between agency and structure to co-exist. To do this, Wendt introduces the concepts of ‘individuality’ and ‘terms of individuality’ described above, arguing that without a self-constituting individuality: ‘culture would have no raw material to exert its constitutive effects upon, nor could agents resist those effects’ (Wendt, 1999, p. 182).

As a solution to this issue, Wendt introduces the concepts of ‘individuality’ and ‘terms of individuality’. Building upon the assumption of rationality highlighted above, Wendt borrows a split in agency introduced by the philosopher George Herbert Mead. Mead splits agency into two categories: individuality and the terms of individuality (Wendt, 1999, pp. 181–2; Kratochwil, 2006, p. 31). Wendt defines ‘individuality’ in this way:

[...] The former refers to those properties of an agent’s constitution that are self-organizing and thus not intrinsically dependent on a social context. Some of these properties are material [...] Others are cognitive: agents exist partly in virtue of their own thoughts, which they can continue to have even if they are marooned on a desert island. (Wendt, 1999, p. 181)

He then defines the ‘terms of individuality’ as:

[...] those properties of an agent’s constitution that are intrinsically dependent on culture, on the generalized Other. (Wendt, 1999, p. 182)

In other words, ‘individuality’ can be understood to be the elements of an agent that are not the product of his or her social context, notably his ability to think and act rationally. The

‘terms of individuality’, on the other hand, are all the socially constructed meanings, understandings and self-perceptions within which the individual’s ability to think and act rationally operates.

The distinction between individuality and the terms of individuality in Wendt’s approach allows him to argue that causal and constitutive relationships can and do overlap and co-exist. ‘Individuality’ represents the elements within agency which are not subject to a relationship of mutual constitution with structure – in other words, ‘individuality’ is the part of agents which is indeed conceptually independent from structure. The ‘terms of individuality’ on the other hand, are what develops from the process of mutual constitution with social structures – it is the aspect of agency which is not independent from structure. By separating these two elements of agency, Wendt allows for both causal and constitutive relationships between structure and agency to exist.

Nicholas Onuf, on the other hand, adopts a slightly different position with slightly different implications. Describing the process of mutual constitution as a ‘continuous, two-way process’ through which ‘constructivism holds that people make society, and society makes people.’ (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 4), Onuf rejects any distinction between the material and the social world, arguing that such a distinction is not required to recognise the existence of an independent, natural reality of individuals as ‘materially situated biological beings’. According to Onuf, people and society construct each other, but not ‘wholly out of mind’ (Onuf, 1989, p. 40). Although this seems to reject the ‘cognitive’ aspects of individuality put forward by Wendt above, Onuf does, slightly later in his book, include the notion of ‘inner nature’: ‘society constructs human beings out of the raw materials of nature, whether inner nature, or, less problematically, the outer nature of their material circumstances.’ (Onuf, 1989, p. 46).

Although it is important to recognise these distinctions within constructivist thought, the theoretical framework which I am building to analyse minority nationalist party activity and rhetoric does not require me to address the question of ‘individuality’ or ‘raw materials’. An analysis of the impact of agency (parties) and structure (rules, institutions, unintended consequences) on each other would seem sufficient. In addition to this, as Onuf recognises, although it is possible to provide interpretations of the ways in which rules, institutions affect and are affected by agency, it is considerably more problematic to analyse, empirically, the individuality or the inner nature of political parties and of the people representing them. Even if such a task were possible, it is unclear whether it would contribute in any way to the purpose

of this study, or whether political parties, which are social constructs bringing together a variety of individuals, can in fact have an ‘inner nature’ at all.

This, however, does not negate the importance of ‘material circumstances’ when considering the capability of a party to act or spread its ideas within a political arena. It is commonly accepted that a party’s financial resources, activist numbers, access to media and electoral support levels will affect their ability to interact with and challenge rules and institutions. The question of material resources is, for instance, crucial to understand the limited impact most minority nationalist parties have in their respective countries: most minority nationalist parties in Western Europe are very small groups with limited resources, no reliable access to traditional media and small activist numbers which in turn limits their ability to spread their message and gain support within the local and national electorate.

In the case of Scotland, Catalonia and Corsica, the material circumstances also clearly affect the way in which minority nationalist parties go about promoting their ideas and how they envisage implementing them. The relative geographic, economic and demographic size of the territories which these parties seek to represent played a crucial part in their ability to promote their ideas and challenge national-level policies and rule. Geography and demography are two elements through which a given minority nationalist party’s potential influence is inevitably capped: while Catalonia and Scotland have a significant weight either politically, economically, geographically and demographically (often a combination of all these factors), Corsican parties find their ability to occupy the national-level political agenda limited: with a population representing 0.4% of the total French population and four members of parliament in the National Assembly (out of 577), Corsican nationalist parties find themselves drawing upon ‘material circumstances’ to build their political action and rhetoric (Emmanuelli, 2017; France 3 Corse Via Stella, 2017).

Whether one looks at the ‘terms of individuality’ or what society constructs in human beings out of the ‘raw materials of nature’, neither terminology adequately describes what, exactly, is being constituted by structure in agency. Constructivist social theory offers two answers to that question: what is being constituted in agency are both identities, and interests.

Identities and interests

An important distinction Wendt makes is the one between agent behaviour and agent properties, namely their identities and interests. Although according to him structures have effects on both, property effects tend to be deeper because they imply behavioural effects too, whilst merely behavioural effects do not necessarily imply property effects. In other words, structure can affect behaviour through identity and interests or behaviour alone, but it cannot affect identity and interests through behaviour (Wendt, 1999, pp. 26–27). It is therefore important to look at how interests and identities are conceptualized as two of the key elements of agency upon which the process of mutual constitution with structure has an important effect.

A good starting point to analyse the conceptualisation of identity in constructivism is to look at the way the concept is discussed and presented in Alexander Wendt's work. According to him, actor identities emerge from their participation in the collective meanings which frame and guide their actions (Wendt, 1992). First defining identities as 'social relationships' (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 65), a similar conceptualization of identity as collective or shared meanings emerges when Klotz and Lynch conceptualise identity in the context of state sovereignty, arguing that sovereignty as an identity is rooted in self-perception and, more importantly, external recognition (2007, p. 67). Wendt however, goes one step further and attaches the notion of institution to his conceptualisation of identity, defining institutions in a slightly different way to Onuf's definition. Institutions, for Wendt, are stable sets of roles and identities that can be formalised through rules and norms and depend on agent participation in collective knowledge (Wendt, 1992). This is the stage at which mutual constitution occurs in Wendt's understanding of identity: agents, participating in the collective meanings that are the basis of institutions, develop specific role identities rooted in theories which actors collectively hold about themselves and one another (Wendt, 1992). Agents, participating in a variety of institutions and holding a variety of understandings of both self and Other, will develop several specific identities which will increase or decrease in salience depending on the context of agency. Drawing on similar examples used by Wendt (Wendt, 1992), here is another example that might help clarify this point. An individual's identities as a voter, a professional sportsperson or a neighbour will not be all equally as relevant at all times. Depending on which context the agent is acting in, different identities will be salient at different times. An individual's identity as a professional sportsperson or a neighbour is less salient than his identity as a voter when he is acting within the context of political or electoral institutions.

As with structure and agency, identity within constructivism is subject to change and cannot be considered to be a permanently fixed or given variable. Klotz and Lynch highlight a number of elements which can lead to identity change, focusing primarily on discursive challenges and interpellation (Klotz and Lynch, 2007). Firstly, and more broadly, individuals and groups are able to challenge the dichotomies on which established identities are built to open up new potential alternative identities.

However, according to Klotz and Lynch, identity changes do not always necessarily come from individuals' actions or decisions. Identity can also be imposed by social elites upon individuals, through a process they call 'interpellation' (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 80). They define interpellation as:

The process through which people accept or adopt an identity articulated by elites. Publics are "hailed" into specific identities through the reiteration of characteristics of selves and others. People presumably acquiesce to, or actively embrace, representations when they recognize themselves in these tropes. Drawing on cultural references and common vocabulary, elites try to speak in a language that resonates with their audiences. (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 80).

In this process, leaders promote representations and identities which make certain policies possible and acceptable, whilst marginalising alternative conceptions of identity and alternative policy agendas. Interpellation, as well as being an explanation for potential identity changes, also contributes to an explanation of the strength and resilience of state backed discourses and identities, by highlighting the power elites and leaders have over public discourse and how this affects both agents' identities and their ability to bring forward alternative discourses (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 81).

Both aspects of identity are visible when analysing minority nationalist parties. While, for instance, the Scottish National Party has used its position as governing party in Scotland, as well as Scotland's historically-rooted distinctiveness and its newfound institutional strength following several stages of devolution since 1997, to establish itself almost as an equal partner to the 'national-level' United Kingdom government, to be consulted on most major decisions affecting Scotland. In contrast, while minority nationalist parties in Catalonia and Corsica also claim a similar status, central governments in both France and Spain impose, constitutionally and through day-to-day rhetoric, a hierarchical relation between the central government and the minority nationalist-led governments at the sub-national level. This central government-led

identification of both the Catalan and Corsican authorities as subordinate sub-national bodies contributes to the delegitimization of minority nationalist identification within these territories. In short, both the identity adopted by minority nationalist parties and the extent to which it is accepted, embraced or denied by other relevant political actors are important elements to understand minority nationalist party action and rhetoric.

Interests are the other main way in which mutual constitution manifests itself in agency. Different constructivist scholars conceptualise interests in slightly different ways, emphasising different aspects of the mutual constitution process and defining interests in ways that highlight different points. Alexander Wendt, using a definition by Rosenberg, defines interests as beliefs agents have about meeting their needs, needs which are split between identity needs which emerge from beliefs and understandings and material needs, which all humans share (Wendt, 1999, p. 130).

Onuf, on the other hand, focusing more on the practical element of interests, defines them as recognisable patterns in agents' goals and resource use, resources made available by the rules that frame agents' action (see above) (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 9). From a practical perspective, Onuf and Wendt's approaches appear to be complementary rather than competing. In the same chapter, Onuf argues that one can guess the rules that regulate action by looking at agents' practices (Onuf *et al.*, 2013). The ability to guess rules and the collective understandings that underpin them by analysing agent processes means that, through analysing stable patterns in agent goals and resource use one can at least guess at the beliefs agents have about fulfilling needs. By defining interests with regards to agent practices rather than beliefs Onuf provides an easier avenue for empirical research than trying to delve immediately into agent beliefs, without undermining the conceptualisation of interests provided by Wendt.

Klotz and Lynch focus primarily on opposing the constructivist understanding of interests to that found in most mainstream international relations theories. Rather than define interest as the pursuit of material resources, they define interests as: 'the product of constitutive processes that lead people, as individuals and members of collectivities, to synthesize a wide range of needs and desires' (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, pp. 103–4). This definition, broader in scope, encompasses the variety of needs and desires identified by Wendt, whilst recognising the importance of mutual constitution in the development of individual and group interests.

Inequality and change

Understanding the process of mutual constitution of agency and structure is insufficient for the purpose of this study. Taken alone, the concept of mutual constitution does create the impression of a social world in which all agents in a given context are equally impacted by that context and equally able, through their practices, to alter it. Once we are able to understand the mechanisms through which minority nationalist parties develop a particular identity and interests, it is important to complement this by adding both Onuf's concept of 'rule', to conceptualise the ways in which minority nationalist parties might (or might not be) in a disadvantageous or subordinate position within the sociopolitical context they operate in, and constructivism's potential for change, which will allow us to explain how, if at all, minority nationalist can aspire to, and in practice attempt to, bring about change to the structure in which they act.

Rules yield rule

One of the characteristics of Onuf's interpretation of constructivism is its emphasis on inequality. This is best understood through the lens of his 'rules yield rule' concept. The idea is rooted in agents' responses to rules, using resources. When, for instance, an agent violates a rule, other agents can mobilise resources to enforce the rule (often using other rules that legitimise this). This ability to use resources in response to rules, according to Onuf, grants some agents greater control over the content of rules than others. This is what Onuf describes as the 'condition of rule' (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, pp. 16–18). A condition of rule, if sufficiently institutionalised, can lead to certain agents being recognised as rulers (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 7); an example of this for instance can be drawn from our previous considerations over institutions and more specifically regarding the importance of constitutional courts in France and Spain – as we argued above, the constitutional court, as an agent, exercises the exclusive right over the enforcement and interpretation of constitutional rules, placing them in the position of rulers in that specific context.

The condition of rule extends, according to Onuf, to all types of political society, which he understands as being grounded in relations of super- and subordination, or 'relations maintained through rules and obtaining in rule' (Onuf, 1989, p. 196). Conditions of rule are deemed to be stable, because rulers limit the capacity of the ruled to imagine alternatives that could undermine the ruling position of the rulers. The position of the ruled is therefore accepted

as being natural (Onuf, 1989, p. 211). The concept of rule, however, is not a monolithic one: much like the rules that maintain relations within a political society, rule itself is divided up into three main categories: hegemony, hierarchy and heteronomy. Onuf describes hegemony as a condition where superordinate actors (or rulers) monopolise meaning, and subordinate actors (who are unable to comprehend their position as being subordinate) have no alternative but to passively accept this. The second form of rule that Onuf identifies is that of hierarchy, which can be broadly understood as a system resting on directive-rules which are coercively enforced by the agents at the top of the hierarchy (Onuf, 1989, pp. 211–2). This is most closely associated with pyramidal command structures, in which each level of the hierarchy, excluding the top and the lowest level, is simultaneously coerced by and coercing other agents into engaging in specific types of behaviour or, to re-use some of the terminology developed in the previous section, coercively enforces an identity and interests within the hierarchical structure. The final type of rule described by Onuf is that of heteronomy, best described as:

‘the actual situation of people relating available means to particular ends. Nevertheless, when people are self-conscious about their individual behaviour, they are inclined to see themselves as rational and autonomous’ (Onuf, 1989, p. 213)

Heteronomy, which Onuf uses to describe the situation of states within the international system, is a situation in which commitment-rules regulate, unequally, the material opportunities of agents within the system, all while continuing to allow the ruled to sustain an illusion of autonomy (Onuf, 1989, p. 219).

As is common with ideal-types, none of the types of rule identified above neatly fit the sort of political structures minority nationalist parties operate in. The inclusions of these concepts, however, allows us to recognise that, although minority nationalist parties are agents in their own right, they are more often than not subjected to a condition of rule that severely restricts what they can legitimately pursue. These conditions of rule in which minority nationalist parties find themselves vary depending on the level of analysis and can be reasonably expected to combine various aspects of the categories describe above. To provide a brief insight, minority nationalist parties can be reasonably seen as agents ‘relating available means to particular ends’, yet this is not accompanied by a particularly strong illusion of autonomy. Similarly, although the position of minority nationalist parties (especially in government) can best be characterised by hierarchy, they are certainly able to imagine

alternatives that could undermine the ruling position of the rulers, and they actively seek to bind rulers to further, extensive commitment-rules that could potentially lead to a change in the position of the rulers (understood as the institutions of central government in our particular case).

The behaviour of minority nationalist parties, as agents, is influenced by the rules and institutions under which they operate. These rules and institutions create a condition of rule, in which some agents hold greater control and greater legitimacy to enforce and shape the content of rules. However, as constructivism's idea of mutual constitution shows, agents are not passive victims of structure – opening up a potential for change within constructivism and within our theoretical framework.

Change in constructivism

The possibility of change lies at the heart of Wendt's constructivist theory of international relations and his critique of neorealism. Much of his critique of neorealism, whether in his 1992 article *Anarchy is what the States make of it* or in his later book *A Social Theory of International Politics* is aimed at showing that neorealism's static understanding of anarchy as a self-help system is flawed, and that different self-understandings and interactions between agents can lead to change in the international system from a self-help system to one characterised by cooperation, for instance (Wendt, 1992). Agents which, as we saw above can act and think rationally independent of structure, are able through action to undermine and bring about change in the structures they operate in. Using the example of international culture, Wendt argues that culture is not static but dependent on agent practices, which can sustain or undermine cultures and bring about change (Wendt, 1999, p. 188).

The possibility of change is also reflected in most of the constructivist research methodologies and strategies highlighted by Klotz and Lynch. According to them, one of the key debates at the heart of constructivism is not whether structures are immutable or not, but whether they are stable or unstable (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 25). Focusing notably on the discursive approaches highlighted in the section above, the dominant understandings at the heart of structures can be challenged discursively by agents, who are able to provide a basis for alternative conceptions which can lead to structural change. The changes brought about by competing discursive narratives are highlighted notably by Maja Zehfuss and her study of the identity of the Federal Republic of Germany after the Cold War in relation to military intervention abroad, which acts as a backdrop to her critique of Wendt's conception of identity

(Zehfuss, 2006). In her example, she highlights how actors, by proposing alternative narratives of German history and the normative elements that are drawn from it, helped to create different understandings of Germany's military role in the world and allowed for the development of a limited German role in foreign military interventions, something which according to Zehfuss was initially unthinkable (Zehfuss, 2006).

Onuf's constructivism provides a clear overview of the way in which the process of mutual constitution affects structure (understood as rules, institutions and unintended consequences) and agency. We have already described quite extensively in the section above the impacts of rules and institutions on agency. Rules constitute agents in specific social contexts, provide those agents with choices, and establish which means and ends are legitimate while establishing which resources agents can rely upon to achieve their goals. Onuf, however, also provides a strong overview of the way in which agency can affect structure in this process of mutual constitution. With institutions defined as 'stable patterns of rules and practices', it is logical that agents, through practices, can shape the context within which they operate and perhaps change institutional features themselves. As we have seen above, Onuf grants the possibility of agents rationally deciding to break rules, leading to the enforcement of the broken rules by other agents. However, as an alternative, Onuf also recognises the possibility of agents, instead of enforcing rules, using resources to alter rules, a process which he describes as 'slow' and 'costly' (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 17).

The notion of change being 'slow' and 'costly' is best understood through the lens of the 'path dependence' concept, a concept central to the theory of historical institutionalism but which has also emerged in constructivist writings to explain the difficulties of securing change. The notion of path dependence seeks to explain why certain institutions, certain rules, certain meanings are durable and stable across time. This durability is caused by what historical institutionalists term 'positive feedback mechanisms' and 'increasing returns' (Bulmer, 2009, pp. 309–310). These two mechanisms institutionalise practices into paths, where only some policy choices are conceivable and change both 'slow' and 'costly' (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 82).

Pierson, in his book *Politics in Time*, provides a very clear overview of the historical institutionalist approach to path dependency. Placing the emphasis on sequence and time, Pierson highlights four key characteristics of increasing returns: unpredictability, inflexibility, nonergodicity and potential path inefficiency (Pierson, 2000, p. 253). Both unpredictability

(which describes the large impact of early events in a historical sequence) and nonergodicity (accidental, early events in a sequence do not cancel out) point to the crucial role played by historical sequencing in the development of institutions. However, inflexibility and potential path inefficiency are more relevant factors when describing the difficulty of securing institutional change. Nonflexibility describes the idea according to which the longer a historical process continues, the harder it is to change it, while potential path inefficiency describes how in the long run, institutional choices can turn out to be less effective than potential alternatives (Pierson, 2000, p. 253).

According to Pierson, there are many other reasons for the emergence of path dependence in politics. For instance, he argues that institutions, because they are often grounded in law and formally established, are difficult to change. Institutions generate learning, expectations. They develop political and social identities and encourage agents to invest in skills and networking. Once this initial effort has been achieved by agents, the attractiveness of alternative arrangements, with all the adaptive efforts this entails, decreases significantly. In other words, the more agents become used to and invested in an institution, the less they will be willing to consider change (Pierson, 2000, p. 259). Other relevant factors which are used to explain dependency include time horizons, which describe the idea that democratic political leaders, due to their short mandates, will be unwilling or unable to implement significant changes whose consequences might not be clear until long after their departure from office. Political leaders will have a tendency to carry out short-term changes, from which they can reap the political benefits while still in office (Pierson, 2000, p. 262). Related to this, Pierson also highlights what he describes as ‘the status quo bias of political institutions’, with many institutions implementing significant barriers (supermajorities, unanimity) to change (Pierson, 2000, p. 262).

All three of these reasons for the emergence of path dependence have direct relevance to the subject matter of this project. The issue of initial costs and adaptation to institutions can be seen as one of the reasons why the French government has been reluctant to develop systematic, widespread regional language teaching, with all the training and recruiting costs this entails (Kranzer, 2015). Both time horizons and the status quo bias of institutions directly impact on the stance of both the Spanish and French governments with regards to minority nationalist demands for constitutional reform, an issue that minority nationalist parties are well aware of in their own discourse (see Fenu a Corsica, 2016 for an example of this). Many, if not all, of the institutions and rules minority nationalist parties have to contend with in their

political activity are subject to path dependence as described by historical institutionalists, making change difficult to implement.

Although Onuf, and the idea of path dependency, might lead us to think that institutional or rule change is inherently slow and costly, it does not necessarily need to be. Historical institutionalism provides us with a concept, ‘critical junctures’ to explain moments in history where long standing, established institutions and rules are challenged, undermined and replaced (Pierson, 2004; Bulmer, 2009, p. 309). Described by Risse and Wiener, critical junctures are periods ‘during which long-time stable structures change’, causing ‘significant shifts in identity and behaviour’ (Risse and Wiener, 1999, p. 780). With both path dependency and critical junctures integrated into this framework, I am now able to account for both the slow pace of change in most matters involving minority nationalist parties, as well as the potential for single events (electoral results, significant changes in policy) to precipitate significant change.

A few examples from the cases in this study will highlight this. Many of the events that have taken place during the period of this study are, or have the potential to be, critical junctures. The cease-fire declared by the FLNC can be understood as a critical juncture, at which the long standing, established institution of political violence in Corsica was ended, leading to significant changes in behaviour and identity, namely a renewed focus on democratic politics and a softening of the traditional radical/moderate dichotomy that characterised Corsican nationalist politics until then (Olivesi, 1998; Hepburn and Elias, 2011; Corsica Infurmazione, 2015c; U Ribombu Internazionale, 2015). Similarly, electoral results can be understood as critical junctures or at the very least, potential critical junctures. The Scottish independence referendum in 2014 challenged the very notion of a United Kingdom, while a vote in favour of independence would, according to some observers, have triggered further pushes for independence in other territories in Europe (Elias, 2008b, p. 10). In Catalonia, the victory of pro-independence parties in the September 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections triggered a significant political challenge to the notion of indivisibility of the Spanish nation, to the extent that a major national party (Podemos) proposed an independence referendum for Catalonia in their manifesto for the June 2016 general elections in Spain (Rubio, 2016). Significant political events act as potential critical junctures for minority nationalist parties by putting issues onto the national or international agenda and putting sometimes long-standing institutions and rules into question.

Norm diffusion: norm entrepreneurs, norm life cycle and change.

In addition to providing an alternative concept in the form of norms as we saw above, the norm diffusion literature contributes significantly to our understanding of normative change. While Onuf and Pierson's contributions allow us to establish that norms or rules are indeed prone to change through agent actions and contestation (and that this process is often slow and costly), norm diffusion as a concept gives us the required tools to explore in further detail how exactly norms can change.

A few different definitions of norm diffusion have been proposed in academic literature. Among them, Allison-Reumann describes norm diffusion as the 'transfer of, among others, regulatory, cooperative, institutional, and political norms from one actor to another (Allison-Reumann, 2017). Checkel defines norm diffusion in simpler terms, describing it simply as 'the process of inducing actors into the norms and rules of a given community' (Checkel, 1999). More broadly perhaps, studying norm diffusion allows us to understand in what way a given norm can emerge, be adopted by various agents to perhaps become, eventually, a dominant and widely accepted norm. As in the case of rules and norms however, most academic literature describes norm diffusion not through a single definition, but by setting the different ways in which such a process can take place. In their overview of norm diffusion in the context of the European Union, Risse and Börzel provide five different ways in which a given norm can spread from one agent to another and gain broader acceptance. While not exhaustive, these five pathways for norm diffusion form an excellent basis for analysis and, as we will see, are relevant in many ways to the processes that occur around minority nationalist party activity. These avenues for spread are: coercion, manipulation of utility calculations, socialization, persuasion and emulation (Börzel and Risse, 2009). As we will see across the following chapters, all five different forms of norm diffusion can take place, often simultaneously, between minority nationalist parties and other relevant agents around them. A few short examples will be provided here.

Coercion and the manipulation of utility calculations are two ways in which norm diffusion (or norm enforcement) can take place between minority nationalist parties and central governments. Examples of coercion and utility calculation can be found in the cases studied in this thesis: in the case of Catalonia, the forceful dissolution of the Catalan government through the imposition of article 155 of the Spanish Constitution (Torregrosa, 2017) can be seen simultaneously as the enforcement of a constitutional rule by the Spanish central government in the face of rule-violating behaviour from the Catalan minority-nationalist-led government,

but also as the (re)imposition of norms (for instance Spanish territorial integrity) that had been growing weaker and weaker under the normative challenge put forward by minority nationalist parties. Utility calculation, can also be seen as part of the explanation as to why all minority nationalist parties studied in this thesis are now committed to democratic politics as the most effective way of achieving their goals – not only does democratic success provide a significant legitimacy boost, but alternatives to democratic politics often come with a significant legitimacy penalty within the political contexts in which these parties operate.

Emulation and socialization frequently operate together – in Börzel and Risse’s understanding, socialization and emulation function in a similar way, but socialization is a more overt process while emulation occurs indirectly (Börzel and Risse, 2009). In many respects, the decision by Corsican nationalists to end the use of political violence can also be understood as socialization – during this process, radical Corsican nationalists adapted their identity, adopted new norms of behaviour in order to secure greater normative approval and legitimacy, most notably in the eyes of their electorate and, indirectly, from the standpoint of the French central government. Similarly, the impact of emulation on the rhetoric of Catalan minority nationalist parties is evident, and recognised by senior elected officials. In an interview with Catalan Member of the European Parliament Ramón Tremosa i Balcells (Appendix A, interview 8), the impact of the Scottish National Party’s own pursuit of independence in Scotland was widely acknowledged, and the Scottish National Party’s securing of an independence referendum in 2014 was frequently highlighted as an example for Catalan parties to follow.

Finally, persuasion best characterises the process of norm diffusion from minority nationalist parties to the electorate at the national and sub-national level. At this stage, the day-to-day rhetoric of minority nationalist parties plays an important part in securing further support from the electorate – a prerequisite for electoral success and for minority nationalist parties to access positions of political power that can be used to further challenge norms and rules held at the national level.

While norms can, and indeed, do, diffuse from one actor to another, how do they emerge, and how do they get into a position where diffusion becomes possible? In their work, Finnemore and Sikkink describe three major stages of the ‘norm life cycle’, which describes the various stages a norm goes through from its emergence to its potential full acceptance by

all concerned agents. The three stages are ‘norm emergence’, ‘norm cascade’ and ‘norm internalization’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). All three stages are useful to understand how the basic ideas put forward by minority nationalist parties emerge and spread.

In the words of Sikkink and Finnemore, ‘norms do not appear out of thin air; they are actively built by agents having strong notions about appropriate or desirable behaviour in their community’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). These agents, introduced in norm diffusion literature as the key agents in the process of ‘norm emergence’, are called ‘norm entrepreneurs’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Macdonald, 2015). Defined by Björkdahl as actors with ‘a strong commitment to a particular norm [...] willing to advocate this norm and to bring about normative change’ (Bjorkdahl, 2012), norm entrepreneurs propose new norms, deemed to be more desirable or better suited than alternative norms, and attempt to persuade other key agents that these norms are preferable. As we have seen above, this process can take different forms depending on which relevant agents are involved: norm diffusion between a norm entrepreneur and the state often takes the form of lobbying through non-governmental organisations (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Macdonald, 2015). Failing this, and most frequently in the case of political parties, this process of persuasion often takes place in the context of democratic politics, where political parties (and, in some cases, civil society organisations), attempt to persuade an electorate that their norms as well as the proposals that stem from these norms present a better alternative than those put forward or defended by the central government or other competing political parties.

In order to successfully impose a norm within a given political environment or context, norm entrepreneurs are required to target what Finnemore and Sikkink call, in an international relations context, ‘critical states’, that is, critical agents without whom the success and widespread adoption of a given norm is compromised (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). In the case of minority nationalist parties, there are several, simultaneous potential critical agents that parties target in different ways. As we will see in chapter 4 on self-determination, the inferior hierarchical position of sub-national territories and authorities in relation to the central government places the central government of each respective country as one of the most important critical actors for the types of norms minority nationalist parties seek to promote. In addition to this, the sub-national electorate (as we will see in chapter 5) and other European-level actors or neighbouring states, also represent critical agents that are necessary, but not sufficient, requirements for the success of the kind of norms that minority nationalist parties seek to promote to achieve their goals.

Once a critical mass of critical agents is reached, the second stage, ‘norm cascading’, takes place. This is the point at which norm adoption begins to take place without overt pressure or action from norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). At this stage, socialization and utilitarian calculations lead actors, including secondary or non-critical actors, to adopt a given norm. While there are few examples of this occurring in the context of minority nationalism, the example of the recognition of minority languages across Europe can, arguably, be understood as a norm in the process of cascading – through the establishment of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) by the Council of Europe, most European countries have adopted the norm that a degree of public recognition and promotion of native minority languages is desirable, putting significant pressure on countries (such as France) who continue to be reluctant to implement the charter’s provisions in national law (Locatelli, 2002; Rédaction France Info, 2015).

The final stage, ‘norm internalisation’, takes place when a given norm becomes ‘taken for granted’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998) and no longer the subject of significant challenges or debates. This is the case, as we will see in the third chapter on language, for the protection and promotion of native minority languages in the United Kingdom – with a broad consensus allowing for the recognition, teaching, and public use of languages such as Welsh and Gaelic, minority nationalist parties in both cases have tended to not address this issue in any significant manner. This contrasts significantly with the crucial place given to language in both Catalonia and Corsica, where no such consensus exists.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to develop a comprehensive constructivist framework to understand and analyse why, and how, minority nationalist parties ‘act and speak’ the way they do in Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland. By drawing upon fundamental concepts such as mutual constitution, rules, agency and structure, we are able to analyse, to what extent, the political rules under which minority nationalist parties (as well as every other political actor within the same political environment) operate. By building a set of conceptual tools drawn from constructivist social theory as expressed in both constructivist international relations and norm diffusion, and from historical institutionalism, we have determined that such normative change, while possible from a bottom-up perspective, can be difficult and extremely time-consuming to achieve. Finally, drawing on norm diffusion, the framework allows us to analyse, in detail,

the process behind this time-consuming and difficult process. To challenge and change long-established norms, minority nationalist parties need to propose convincing alternatives, persuade relevant actors (whether directly or indirectly) and establish their alternative understandings sufficiently, sometimes to the extent that they take on a ‘taken-for-granted’ dimension, although this is unlikely.

Previous studies in the literature on minority nationalist parties have highlighted the fruitfulness of complementing and testing empirical research against conceptual frameworks drawn from other, broader, related bodies of literature. Building on that understanding, the framework presented here draws upon a previously neglected body of literature, that of constructivism and norm diffusion, to present an alternative interpretive framework to understand minority nationalist parties as norm entrepreneurs, first and foremost. The complexity of the framework, with its multiple layers of concepts drawn from different (if closely related) academic schools of thought, allows us to account for what is, in practice, a highly complex and multi-layered process. Far from reducing minority nationalist party rhetoric and strategy to a handful of causal mechanisms, the thesis, with the help of this framework, will provide a broad, multi-faceted explanation of the different ways in which minority nationalist parties seek to achieve their goals – and the various and sometimes almost insurmountable obstacles they encounter along the way.

To analyse this however, it is important to adopt methods that allow us to study, in detail, the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties – highlighting which issues, which objectives, and which principles really drive these parties (and the different ways in which they address different challenges and audiences). In the next chapter, I describe these methods, as well as some of the fundamental background information required to understand the cases studied here.

2. Methodological Considerations

What principles, if any, characterise minority nationalist parties? How are they impacted and how do they affect their normative, legal, constitutional and political environment? Through what avenues do they seek to secure change? To answer these questions and the others this thesis addresses, drawing upon empirical knowledge that can be analysed using the conceptual tools developed in the previous chapter is essential. Onuf argues that rules establish what means and ends are legitimate (Little *et al.*, 2013, p. 5). The public communication of political parties, a broad term I use to describe everything political parties communicate to the public in the format of speeches, media interviews, leaflets, books and many other media, is a strong way to analyse not only the aims of these parties, but the ways in which they believe – and seek to convince the electorate – that their means and ends are legitimate. Considering the role of rules in establishing this legitimacy, as well as the centrality of persuasion in establishing an alternative norm and creating a normative challenge, such an analysis is the best way to understand the influence of rules on party rhetoric and strategy, and vice-versa.

While the theoretical framework developed in this thesis draws upon previously neglected concepts in the literature on minority nationalist parties, the methodology used in this thesis reflects, in large part, methodologies used in the literature. While some studies on minority nationalist parties adopt a quantitative methodology (Alonso, Cabeza and Gómez, 2015; Massetti and Schakel, 2015), many other studies focus on a qualitative study of either a small number of cases (Mar-Molinero, 1994; Elias, 2008b; Hepburn, 2009b; Hepburn and Elias, 2011) or single cases (Olivesi, 1998; Guibernau, 2000; Leith and Steven, 2010). Similarly, although the reliance on online media is not frequently encountered in the existing literature, the analysis of party rhetoric through manifestos, speeches or other discursive elements is also a well-established practice within the existing literature on minority nationalist parties. While the thesis does not seek to contribute a new approach to the methodology underpinning the study of minority nationalist parties, the focus on the analysis of discursive elements, albeit collected online, enables the study to rest on a solid methodological basis, underpinned by similar practices in pre-existing literature.

The first section of this chapter focuses primarily on the concept of triangulation, a core research method in qualitative work. Triangulation, in the context of this study, was essential to study to what extent any given rhetorical element or policy was central, or peripheral, to a party's core policy platform and values. By finding similar rhetoric and policy statements

across a wide range of different sources allows us to convincingly argue in favour of a given idea or policy being a fundamental part of the political party's positioning and aims. After a brief description of the reasoning behind the use of multiple methods in this thesis, I then describe, in detail, the data collection process – describing which sources were used and the 'sampling rationale' behind the selection of these different sources. This is followed by a description and analysis of the interview process, the second part of the data collection process undertaken for this research.

Finally, I discuss further methodological points regarding case selection, describing ways in which the selection of Corsica, Scotland and Catalonia as major case studies was not only valid from an empirical perspective (as described in the introduction), but also methodologically convenient and fruitful.

The data collection process: social media, interviews, analysis

In a review of qualitative research, Barusch, Gringeri and George highlight that, in the majority of work surveyed, methods such as 'sampling rationale' and 'triangulation' were used (Barusch, Gringeri and George, 2011, p. 12). A closer analysis of the sampling rationale used for this project will follow further down in the chapter, with a clear description of the rationale behind both the data collection and the case selection processes. The concept of triangulation however, although common in qualitative research, requires a little more exploration.

Triangulation is defined in a variety of ways in the literature, from strict definitions to broader, more general approaches. Some academics, such as Oppermann, describe triangulation as a process specifically drawing from at least three different methods, and specifically drawing from both qualitative and quantitative methods (Oppermann, 2000).

Other academics, such as Arksey and Knight or also Barusch, Gringeri and George, define triangulation in a slightly more flexible way, describing it as 'collecting data from multiple sources' (Barusch, Gringeri and George, 2011, p. 12) or using 'different techniques to explore a single set of research questions' (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 21). Building on this wider understanding of triangulation, any research drawing upon multiple techniques, whether quantitative, qualitative or mixed, and multiple sources can be interpreted as using triangulation as its core methodological idea.

Beyond the basic definition, triangulation is also differentiated in many different ways in the literature. Denzin defined different types of triangulation: methodological, data, investigator and theoretical – all of which can be used individually, or simultaneously if necessary (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 22). In this particular study, two types of triangulation were used: methodological, or the use of various methods to collect data, and data, with a variety of data types drawn from different sources (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 23). As we will see below, both interviews and textual and audiovisual analysis were used, with a variety of data types (texts, interviews, audio recordings, video recordings) drawn from a wide range of different sources. In this respect, this study attempted to engage in multiple triangulation (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 23).

Although different types of triangulation are used in this study, it is also important to highlight exactly what the purpose of triangulation is. Arksey and Knight highlight two key purposes for triangulation: completeness and confirmation, purposes which re-emerge frequently in the literature². In this particular study, triangulation is primarily used to provide completeness to the data set used in the analysis. As we will see below, it became necessary to offset some of the weaknesses of online data collection by using interviews, which provided the necessary data to ‘fill in the gaps’ that had emerged in the online data collection. Offsetting the weaknesses of a single method by bringing in another is another key characteristic of methodological triangulation to feature in this study (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 21).

There are, however, a number of criticisms of triangulation that deserve to be addressed before we proceed to a more detailed description of the methodology used in this project. Blaikie for instance argued that it is unsatisfactory to combine methods with different epistemological and ontological underpinnings – a particular problem for researchers combining more positivist quantitative methods with reflectivist qualitative methods (Arksey and Knight, 1999). This however, is not a particular issue in this research, with interviews frequently understood to be a core element of qualitative research, and textual analysis forming the basis of many interpretivist studies (Zehfuss, 2002).

This similarly addresses the critique of Fielding and Fielding, who argue that triangulation does not fundamentally bring a researcher closer to objectivity or the truth (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 23; Oppermann, 2000, p. 144). While this thesis does seek to

² Confirmation, notably is frequently referred to as “getting closer to the truth” or “eliminating bias” in other academic works.

provide an understanding of the reasons that drive minority nationalist parties to adopt similar rhetoric and similar strategies across various territories, this project does not claim to produce generalizable, objective knowledge – and indeed, alternative interpretations of the rhetoric and actions of minority nationalist parties are possible and available (Keating, 2008b). Other criticisms address the difficulty and practical problems related to triangulation (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 23). Collecting from a variety of data sources, and using different methods for this project lead to a number of practical problems, including the availability of data, language barriers and interviewee availability. Other aspects of triangulation, such as researcher triangulation (using multiple researchers to offset individual biases) were impossible to implement within the framework of a doctoral thesis. These practical limitations, however, did not prevent me from carrying out the analysis, and as was described the use of multiple methods and multiple data sources and types contributed to offset some of these practical problems.

The two major stages of this research project were as follows: a social media data collection, and interviews. This combination of methodological and data triangulation, combining different methods and a variety of data sources, provided the basis for the analysis in this thesis. It is to these two processes that I now turn my attention.

Social media collection

The data collection on social media was carried out from June 2015 to June 2016 inclusive, allowing me to cover a number of significant events within each of the territories analysed: the United Kingdom general election in May 2015, the Catalan parliamentary elections in September 2015 and the French territorial elections in December 2015 are three examples of major events for minority nationalist parties covered by the timeframe used for the collection process (BBC News, 2015c; Vilaweb, 2015; Willsher, 2015). In addition to this initial period of data collection, further, shorter periods of data collection became necessary when major relevant events occurred. Accordingly, further data was collected in May and June 2017 to cover the United Kingdom General election as well as the French Parliamentary elections, and between October and December 2017 to cover the attempted Catalan independence referendum, subsequent crisis and the December 2017 Catalan parliamentary elections.

Most of the data used to analyse the rhetoric and action of minority nationalist parties in Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland was collected from official social media accounts (both corporate and personal accounts of leading figures within the parties) and from the online editions of major local, regional and national newspapers in the relevant territories. Collecting from these two sources allowed me to obtain a wide variety of data, from official speeches, media interviews, television appearances to short, targeted, issue specific postings on social media. Analysing party activity online also allowed me to gather data aimed at different audiences: from short messages targeted at party supporters or other political actors to broader, national newspaper appearances targeted at the wider audience of national or regional newspapers, radio or television channels.

Social media data collection was also particularly fruitful for several other reasons. First, and perhaps the most practical point, is the low-cost of social media data collection: through social media, and assuming the objects of study have a significant presence online, a very significant body of data can be acquired with relative ease over prolonged periods of time. This differs most notably from interviews, which often only provide only a snapshot of empirical evidence, and from more traditional forms of long-term ‘on the ground’ study that often require a significant, resource-intensive commitment from the researcher which would have been, in the case of this study, impossible to achieve across all three cases equally.

Social media, with its emphasis on networking and the relative ease through which users can relay relevant information from other contributors, was also particularly helpful in establishing all of the relevant party-political actors, civil society actors and individual politicians within a given minority nationalist movement. While the initial sample of accounts, parties, and individuals used in this study was drawn from prior research and academic literature, many other sources of information emerged over time as they were relayed, engaged with and mentioned by social media accounts in the initial sample. This process, which can be described as a form of ‘snowballing’, proved particularly fruitful in the context of a social media analysis through which a clear picture of all relevant agents within a given movement became very clear early in the study. In addition to providing a more complete picture, this process also allowed for a larger selection of relevant data, and to a greater degree in confidence in the conclusions drawn from the data.

In Corsica, my main data sources were social media accounts representing both *Femu a Corsica* and *Corsica Libera* as well as their leaders (Jean-Guy Talamoni and Gilles Simeoni)

and other leading figures such as Jean Christophe Angelini for *Femu a Corsica* and Petr'Antone Tomasi or Massimu Poli for *Corsica Libera* (Collectivité Territoriale de Corse, 2016). Party publications were also drawn upon, such as Corsican radical newspaper *U Ribombu Internaziunale* as well as publications representing the moderate branch of Corsican nationalism, such as *Arriti*. In addition to the online content these publications produced, I also drew upon any other multimedia content published by the official social media accounts associated with these publications, with *U Ribombu Internaziunale*'s account on video-sharing website *Dailymotion* providing a significant amount of video data encompassing speeches and public meetings held by minority nationalist parties and civil society groups. Another significant source of data especially with regards to nationalist party activity and rhetoric was the nationalist news website *Corsica Infurmazione*, which primarily reports on all public statements, political meetings and media appearances made by Corsican nationalist actors in what is termed the '*mouvement national*' (national movement), encompassing all political and social actors associated with Corsican nationalism.

In addition to these sources, more 'traditional' media sources were also drawn upon, including public-owned television channel *France 3* and their Corsican regional version '*France 3 Corse Via Stella*'. Combined with Corsican newspaper *Corse Matin* and Corsican-language radio *Alta Frequenza*, data drawn from these sources allowed me to access and analyse how non-party political news sources were addressing the political action and rhetoric of nationalist parties in Corsica, and how this was being reported to the wider Corsican population. Occasionally, when significant events occurred such as the electoral victory of Corsican nationalists in the French territorial elections in December 2015, data was also drawn from major national newspapers such as *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Libération*, allowing me to analyse how major events in the political life of Corsica and Corsican nationalist parties were presented to a wider, French and international audience.

A similar selection of sources was used to analyse party rhetoric and actions in Catalonia. As with Corsica, official social media accounts of all main minority nationalist parties (initially the CiU coalition, then *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC), ERC and *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* (CUP)) were used to gather a wide selection of data ranging from short posts to longer press releases, speech transcripts and recorded television, radio or public appearances. Catalan parties were by far the most active on social media out of the

parties analysed in all three territories, providing a very large quantity of data to analyse their rhetoric and action. To provide an example, a wide selection of all social media postings including short messages, recordings of television or radio interventions, press releases and official commentary posted online by party officials and leaders yielded over six hundred individual pieces of data in September 2015, the month of the Catalan parliamentary elections. During election campaigns, Catalan parties also produced several television election broadcasts, providing further insight into the way they sought to promote their political platform to the wider Catalan electorate.

A wide range of local and regional media was also used. Catalan minority nationalist politicians were frequently invited to various political shows on regional television and radio channels (such as TV3 or RAC1), providing an almost day-to-day picture of the way the political platform and rhetoric of these parties developed and changed over the period analysed and in response to political events. Similarly, minority nationalist parties were also very widely covered in regional newspapers and regional news websites, including *El Punt Avui*, *El Periodico*, *La Vanguardia*, *Vilaweb*, *Raco Catala*. Similarly, Catalan political issues were also frequently covered by national Spanish newspapers such as *El Mundo* and *El Pais*. The widespread availability of both online and print media reporting on Catalan politics allowed me to build a very clear picture of all major political events in Catalonia during the time frame of this study, balancing views from more sympathetic media outlets and media more hostile to the demands and actions of Catalan nationalist parties.

Finally, in Scotland, the range of sources used was comparatively smaller than the sources used for the Catalan and Corsican examples. This is first and foremost because, whereas Corsican and Catalan nationalism are both represented by a variety of parties and other bodies, Scottish nationalism is, in many ways, embodied by the SNP, despite other parties' support for Scottish independence (the Scottish Greens are a good example of this) (The Scottish Greens, 2016). As a result, with regard to gathering data on party policy, rhetoric and action, the official social media accounts of both the SNP and its leading members were drawn upon, including that of First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, Alex Salmond, a former First Minister and influential Member of Parliament and Angus Robertson, current leader of the SNP group in the House of Commons. The activity of both corporate and individual social media accounts allowed me to gather a very large quantity of data on the SNP's rhetoric and policy on a very

wide range of issues, highlighting not only the ideological platform of the SNP but equally the way in which it seeks to present itself to the Scottish (and British) electorate.

In addition to this, and similarly to the other two cases, a range of Scottish and British media were also used to provide further insight into the way the SNP portrayed itself (and was portrayed) to the public. Scottish newspapers such as *The Scotsman* and the *Daily Record* reported extensively on the SNP throughout the period studied, while televised debates and other interviews broadcast for instance on *STV* provided another opportunity to gather data.

Drawing from all of these sources, a database of relevant data elements was created, including social media posts, videos, traditional media articles and interviews and party press releases. The database spanning from June 2015 to June 2016 continuously (with additional data collection periods in December 2016, June 2017 and October 2017), included several thousands of entries, with particularly high counts for months during which major political events occurred in one or more of the three cases analysed. This database, collected using qualitative analysis software *NVivo*, formed the core of the empirical data upon which the empirical analysis in following chapters was built. The software, a widespread tool used in qualitative studies, provided the best platform to collect, classify and read all of the data elements collected for this thesis, providing a flexible way to create a useful folder structure to classify various data elements and providing a very useful add-on, *NCapture*, that enabled the direct copy of webpages into the database.

Although the collection of this data provided a significant quantity of material to analyse the rhetoric and action of minority nationalist parties, interviews were deemed to a useful addition to the overall data collection process. There are a number of reasons why this was established: firstly, interviews with key political actors within the parties analysed were deemed important to fill any potential gaps in the data collected online – in some cases, certain key topics only emerged around specific times, and a further clarification of the stance adopted by these parties was required. Secondly, due to the concise nature of most newspaper articles, social media postings and media appearances made by political actors in general, interviews were considered to be an important opportunity to address key topics in more depth, as a way to highlight perhaps some of the subtleties that could have potentially been lost in public communication. The interviews conducted for this study, as a whole, provided political actors

with significantly more time to expand their thoughts, as opposed for instance to the highly restrictive environment of most, if not all, media interviews and public speeches.

The interview process

To provide an alternative source of information and discourse from online and media appearances, I also conducted several targeted interviews with minority nationalist political representatives, the list of which can be found in Appendix A. These interviews, in addition to providing a way to verify and validate the discursive trends found online and in traditional media, provided me with an opportunity to address topics that were not frequently addressed in the general public discourse of minority nationalist movements.

In designing the interview process for this study, I decided to target political actors who were either at the top, or close to the top, of their respective party's hierarchy. Although this proved to be difficult in practice as I will explore below, there were several reasons supporting that decision at the time of the interview process design. Party leaders, or party representatives holding significant governmental or party positions, were deemed to be the best source to gather rhetoric that can be accepted as representative of their political party's position as a whole. In addition to this however, as the purpose of the interview process was to provide an alternative source of information and discourse from that gathered from online and media appearances, high-level party representatives and party leaders were seen to be the most likely candidates to provide additional information and rhetoric that may not already be widely available through the party's public discourse. While the number of interviews conducted in this thesis is not sufficient to make a broader claim regarding this, this assumption was broadly borne out in the outcome of this thesis' interview process. Interviews conducted with Corsican nationalist leaders Jean-Guy Talamoni and Gilles Simeoni were both highly productive and allowed me to address broader issues around the self-determination claims of Corsican nationalism and their overall, long-term goals, more deeply than what had been available through public discourse.

The targeting of high-ranking politicians became, however, problematic in the course of the interview process for this study. I faced several major limitations that hindered my ability to interview all the political actors I had intended to interview, and in turn this prevented the interview process from occupying an equivalent place to the online discourse collection in this

thesis. While, as described above, the period of this study was a significant and eventful period for minority nationalist parties and politicians throughout all three cases, this in turn created difficulties when attempting to secure interviews from leading politicians and elected officials. Most notably, the majority of the interviews I attempted to secure with SNP elected officials either within the Scottish Government or within the United Kingdom Parliament were rejected, with lack of time cited as the most frequent reason behind refusals. Similarly, no interviews were conducted with leading Catalan politicians in Catalonia, something that can be primarily attributed to a lack of firm responses to my requests and, at a later stage in the study, a lack of resources which prevented travel to Catalonia to conduct interviews in-situ.

The difficulties encountered in carrying out the interview process led to several changes to my approach throughout the study. One of the more practical impacts of these difficulties was my decision to consider the interviews to gather supplementary information, as opposed to a full-blown and equivalent alternative to the online data collection. As a supplementary source, the interviews still enabled me to challenge and confirm, or question, the discourses analysed online.

Once the difficulties in securing my initial interviews became clear, the second decision which was taken was to broaden the spectrum of politicians approached for interviews. This led to several fruitful interviews with MEPs (both Alyn Smith MEP and Ramon Tremosa MEP), and with other political actors who were still, or were recently, involved in important political roles within the nationalist movements analysed here. In addition to this, a few additional interview opportunities with political actors unrelated or indirectly related to the three cases analysed in this thesis also arose. The interview of Paul Molac, a French Member of Parliament for La République en Marche and a prominent regionalist and linguistic activist, allowed me to gather further information on the broader political context faced by sub-national activists in France, and on the role played by other countries and European institutions in legitimising the demands of French sub-national activists from their perspective. Similarly, the interview of prominent Occitan political leader, David Grosclaude, provided further depth to my understanding of the political context in France. Finally, the interview of Plaid Cymru MEP Jill Evans provided interesting additional information on the political environment faced by minority nationalist parties in the UK. The interview with Jill Evans also provided interesting information on the perception minority nationalist parties have of their relationship with other, similar parties across Europe. This point will be explored in more depth in chapter 5.

The changes in the purpose and scope of the interview process above did alleviate some of the main concerns that emerged early on in the process. Despite the difficulties highlighted above, the requirements of multiple triangulation, as described above, were broadly met. While the number of interviews conducted was small, at least two interviews per major case study were conducted, providing a limited, but concrete alternative source of data collection to satisfy methodological triangulation. The notion of data triangulation, on the other hand, was broadly also satisfied, regardless of the small interview pool used for this study: the online data collection process provided a significant sample of minority nationalist discourse across multiple platforms, multiple media and across several periods of time. For this reason, the comparatively small number of interviews used in this thesis was not considered to be a crippling factor. All of the discursive trends identified in this thesis are exemplified and supported both in the few interviews conducted, and in the several thousands of samples of discourse collected for each of the case studies.

There is no doubt however, that more interviews, notably leading representatives of the minority nationalist parties analysed here could have provided more fruitful information and could have strengthened the overall body of empirical evidence upon which this thesis relies. The scope of the interview process, as well as the difficulties faced in securing most of the expected interviews, are a significant limitation that is fully acknowledged here.

With regard to interview design, semi-structured interviews were preferred. Designed to ‘hear what informants have to say on the topics and areas identified by the researcher’ while giving room to ‘improvise questions to clarify or extend answers’ (Arksey and Knight, 1999), these semi-structured interviews were deemed to be the best way to address key topics while granting the interviewee sufficient flexibility to address other, related topics that I had not anticipated or not understood as being central or important to the rhetoric and thought minority nationalist party leaders and officials. To carry this out, each interview was approached with a pre-prepared list of questions and topics to discuss. However, the interviews remained sufficiently flexible to allow me to further explore any points or key topics the interviewees put forward in response to my initial questions. In many of the interviews conducted for this project, interviewees put forward certain points or certain topics that I did not initially intend to cover, providing new and interesting material to analyse.

Prior to any interviews, and in accordance with the ethics approval granted by the School of Government and International Affairs for these interviews, interviewees were

provided with an interview sheet, which summarised my project, indicated the topics I intended to cover and provided an overview of the interview process, including information regarding recording and data storage and protection. The interview sheet also provided interviewees with an opportunity to grant or withhold consent regarding the recording of the interview, and to indicate their preference with regards to anonymity and direct use of the interview data in the thesis. Each interviewee, shortly before the interview or shortly after, returned the signed form indicating both their willingness or not for the interview to be recorded as well as their willingness to be directly quoted or not on any of the material gathered during the interviews. When the form was returned shortly after, the questions regarding recording and anonymity were reiterated at the beginning of the interview, to make sure interviewee preferences were considered before the interview was carried out.

The interview design was also faced with some additional practical limitations that were taken into account. Time constraints, particularly with high-ranking leaders or politicians, forced me to design interviews in a modular way – key question formed the basis of the interview, but were supplemented by secondary questions expanding on each topic. Depending on the time allocated for my interviews and on the responses of the interviewees, this modular design allowed me to either skip through certain questions to make sure all key topics were addressed, or expand certain topics if they appeared to be particularly fruitful with any given interviewee. The ability to lengthen and shorten interviews depending on the responses and time constraints faced by interviewees, while in some cases damaging to the quality of the data collected, enabled me to secure more interviews that would have been possible had longer interviews been requested. Despite these time constraints however, most of the interviews carried out in this project lasted around an hour, providing me with enough time to address a wide range of topics in sufficient depth to be useful for the analysis in this thesis.

Once social media data and interviews were carried out, the data analysis could be carried out. It is to this process that I now turn my attention.

Data analysis

The data analysis for this thesis focused on three particular aspects, or three stages. Firstly, the data was analysed to highlight key patterns or trends in the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties, especially recurring topics and recurring policy stances. This enabled me to create categories in which to organise the various press releases, media articles, recordings and

social media postings – categories such as ‘democracy’, ‘international/European affairs’ and ‘constitutional change’ were, for instance, particularly frequent and relevant categories in the analysis.

The second stage was, for each respective category, to try and uncover exactly how minority nationalist parties understood their action to be both in compliance with, and constrained by rules. This stage required a more detailed analysis of the various points and arguments developed by minority nationalist parties across the time period of the analysis. As we have described in the previous chapter, rules determine which course of action or which activities are legitimate, while delegitimising alternative courses of action. Analysing exactly how minority nationalist parties presented their actions and their ideas as legitimate and the ways in which they argued against alternative courses of action was deemed to be a direct and accurate way to determine which rules, consciously or subconsciously, framed minority nationalist rhetoric and action.

Finally, the third stage of the analysis was to determine exactly what the rules that legitimised and constrained minority nationalist party rhetoric and action were. Building on the categorisation developed in the first stage and on the analysis carried out in the second stage, I was either able, when explicitly expressed by minority nationalist party actors, to determine what exactly those rules were understood to be, or, when no explicit mention was made, I was able to provide an interpretation of what these rules appear to be through the public communication of the parties concerned. The outcome of all three stages forms the backbone of the analysis presented in chapters four, five and six of this thesis.

To carry out this categorisation and analysis, the qualitative analysis software package *Nvivo* was used. The software, alongside web browser extension *NCapture*, first allowed to collect and preserve all webpages and audiovisual files found throughout the data collection process, enabling me to save offline copies of all relevant pieces of data therefore avoiding any possibility of data loss over the time of the project. This was particularly relevant in both the Catalan and Corsican cases: over the data collection period, Catalan pro-independence party *CDC* changed identity twice, splitting from the *CiU* coalition in June 2015 and launching the *Democràcia i Llibertat* platform for the December 2015 Spanish general election (*Democràcia i Llibertat*, 2015). The party split, as well as the temporary *DiL* branding for the purpose of the December general elections meant that a number of social media accounts and websites

associated with the *CiU* and *DiL* were no longer fully available by the time the data analysis was carried out. In Corsica, key information website *Corsica Infurmazione* faced significant difficulties late in the data collection period, and threatened to close due to continued cyber-attacks and lack of funds. The loss of such a website, had offline copies not been made possible, would have been a crippling development for the data analysis and the project as a whole.

Once offline copies of all relevant data items were obtained, *Nvivo*'s built-in file structure allowed me to categorise all of the data. *Nvivo*'s coding capability helped me to highlight specific sentences or specific paragraphs within the collected data that were relevant to specific topics or helpful to highlight the existence of specific rules. The list of codes used, including examples of relevant data, are included in the following table:

Code	Purpose	Example
Democracy	Covered any grievance expressed by minority nationalist parties regarding democracy, or any attempt to legitimise policy decisions or party stances based on democratic legitimacy.	‘Democracy is unbeatable. We will win. We have the democratic mandate and it all rests upon us now’. (Esquerra Republicana, 2015b)
Identity	Covered any discussion of identity, including any grievances related to unrecognised identities, any attempt to differentiate territorial identity from state-wide identity, any attempts to define territorial identity.	‘I think there exists a Corsican people, which can be defined as a living, open human community that builds and sustains itself also through the integration of people who wish to make our language, our culture, our project, their own’. (Appendix A, Interview 2, my translation).
Language	A sub-set of identity, this code covered any discussion of language, including language grievances and any attempt to legitimise language policy.	‘It is not normal that in a normal country, you cannot use your own language without any concerns’ (Convergents - CDC, 2015e)
Economy	Covers any economic grievance, any economic proposal, any economic discussion or criticism of the central government or of the minority nationalist party-led regional governments.	‘‘In contrast to the Scottish Government’s approach, the UK Government has done little to nothing to promote the Living Wage. Rather than working with trade unions and businesses to promote fair work and decent pay – the Tory Business Secretary spends his time attacking workers’ rights and trade unions’ (Scottish National Party, 2015g)
Constitution	Covered any institutional and constitutional grievances, proposals and discussions. Includes critique of the central government’s constitutional or institutional stance, alternative policy proposals.	‘The state has systematically obstructed all of the initiatives put forward by the Generalitat to secure new revenue and guarantee the welfare state’ (Convergents - CDC, 2015f)
Independence	A subset of the Constitutional code, this covered any direct discussion or legitimisation of independence as a policy goal by minority nationalist parties.	‘The most important thing for us at @Esquerra_ERC (ERC) is to achieve independence to improve the wellbeing of our citizens.’ (Esquerra Republicana, 2015d)
Europe	Covers any discussion of European Union institutions, any statement of support, any critique.	‘Nobody is interested in keeping Catalonia outside of Europe or the Euro’ (Esquerra Republicana, 2015i)
Transnational	Covers any mention of other minority nationalist parties in other territories.	‘C’est l’union des forces nationalistes qui a permis les avancées en Ecosse et en Catalogne !’ (Corsica Infurmazione, 2015a, my translation)

Convergence	Any discursive element that covers the relationship between minority nationalist parties within a single case. Primarily applicable to Catalonia and Corsica.	‘Sondage: Ensemble, les nationalistes pourraient donc remporter la prime du 2 ^e tour, gagner et gouverner. C’est désormais possible’(Talamoni, 2015)
News	Any miscellaneous piece of data that discusses news events that do not fall into any of the above categories. Includes things such as party events, advertising, leadership changes, party name changes.	‘Public meeting #PNC #PartitudiaNazioneCorsa in Aregnu tonight at 7PM, with further work by the Cultura commission tomorrow in Tallà’ (Angelini, 2015)

Table 1: List of codes used in the Nvivo analysis

Before proceeding with a brief analysis of each of these codes, a few important caveats need to be mentioned regarding the coding process and the analysis conducted here. Firstly, the codes above were only used to categorise elements of discourse that could be directly attributed to a minority nationalist party as a corporate agent or to individual representatives of minority nationalist parties. While, for instance, news reports on party policy, campaigning or events were also collected in the data collection process to gain a more detailed understanding of the daily political life of the territories analysed here, second-hand reports of party rhetoric were not used, unless a direct quote that can be attributed back to a minority nationalist party representative was provided. Secondly, the codes here do not claim to be an exhaustive list of all the topics addressed by minority nationalist parties during that period. Rather than provide the basis for quantitative claims regarding topic frequency, these codes were used to categorise discursive elements to facilitate a qualitative analysis of party rhetoric over the period analysed.

The codes themselves were selected based on several different rationales. Codes such as ‘economy’, ‘constitution’ and ‘independence’ were selected as they broadly reflect the realms in which minority nationalist parties are widely understood to operate in in existing literature. Additional codes, such as ‘identity’ were included for two main reasons: identity grievances are often highlighted as a major issue for minority nationalist parties, and to test for the importance of identity-grievances and ‘peopleness’ for parties committed to self-determination. ‘Language’, a sub-set of identity grievances, was also included to make a practical distinction between linguistic grievances and broader identity-based grievances, both contributing to the analysis in the following chapter. The code ‘Europe’ and ‘transnational’ were both included to assess the extent to which minority nationalist parties discuss both European institutions, and other European minority nationalist parties, in their daily rhetoric. This allows us to analyse not just their stance on Europe, but how Europe and other parties can be used as a legitimising factor for their own demands. The code ‘convergence’ was determined to be relevant during the data collection process, as notions of ‘minority nationalist unity’ within both Corsica and Catalonia became significant and dictated electoral and subsequently the political strategy of minority nationalist parties. The data collected under this code was particularly useful to analyse the importance of coalition-building amongst minority nationalist parties and how this contributed to their pursuit of democratic legitimacy as detailed in chapter 4. Finally, code ‘News’ was included to categorise elements of party rhetoric that were useful to understand the political life of minority nationalist parties, but not fundamentally useful per se to analyse their positions and their ideology. This includes mentions of meetings, campaign

events, party name changes or anything else that is relevant to understand the background and political life of a given minority nationalist party.

As highlighted above, and as the examples in the table above illustrate, the main unit of analysis was sentences or paragraphs of minority nationalist party rhetoric and discourse. Many of the data collected on social media, notably from Twitter, often included no more than a single sentence of interest, while longer party publications such as manifestos, speeches or press releases often included far more, and far lengthier, elements of rhetoric. Categorising these into the codes described above allowed me to then make empirically supported assumptions on the types of norms minority nationalist parties were promoting, how they were looking to promote them, how they reacted to the environment they operated in, and how important alternative avenues of norm diffusion were to them.

The ability to fine tune the analysis down the sentence-level (as opposed to classifying entire data items as a whole) enabled me to analyse each piece of data in great detail, and was particularly helpful to analyse larger items such as speeches or party publications that covered multiple topics. The process of coding, by allowing me to categorise specific sentences or paragraphs within each item of data, provided me with a single document in which all rhetoric pertaining to a specific topic (such as ‘democracy’ or ‘international affairs’) was chronologically ordered. These documents, of which one for each territory was produced, were the basis upon which my analysis was built.

Case selection – Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland

Ahead of selecting cases for my project, a broader, preliminary research was undertaken to familiarise myself with a broad range of potential cases for the purpose of this project. Aside from the elements highlighted in the introduction justifying

Party size

Choosing territories with strong, relevant minority nationalist parties also had implications for the practicality of the project. In all three territories concerned, the parties analysed were both highly visible in local, regional and sometimes national media, as well as very active online with a strong network of official social media accounts, websites and other

media sources gravitating around these parties (sympathetic news agencies and websites). In all three cases, the visibility of these parties in media as well as their activity online enabled me to gather a significant amount of data for the analysis. To provide a comparison to illustrate the importance of this point, a look at the number of individual data items collected for the month of September 2015 is helpful. While September 2015 yielded over six hundred individual pieces of data to analyse for Catalan minority nationalist parties, a similar data collection process for Alsatian nationalist party *Unser Land* and Cornish nationalist party *Mebyon Kernow* provided less than ten individual items of data. Many of the smaller parties included initially in the data collection process sometimes yielded no data at all for certain months, with the *Partit Occitan* and *Unitat Catalana* (in Occitania and French Catalonia respectively) being two particularly striking examples of this.

Using party size as a measure, however, also leads to some difficulties. Although democratic self-determination is, as we will see in following chapters, a crucial rule informing the actions, expectations and rhetoric of minority nationalist parties in Catalonia, Scotland and Corsica, it is possible to argue that democracy only plays an important role for parties insofar as they have the required size and influence to be able to compete with other major parties in electoral contests. Although it is clear smaller minority nationalist groups such as the ones claiming to represent Occitania (territory covering much of southern France) focus primarily on cultural activities (Partit Occitan, 2016), other small minority nationalist parties have focused on democratic politics to a similar extent as those in the three territories analysed – a good example of this would be the key role played by Breton regionalist Christian Troadec, who attempted (and failed) to gather sufficient support to stand as a ‘regionalist’ candidate in the 2017 French Presidential elections (Troadec, 2016).

Key Electoral Contests

Another important factor in deciding to focus the thesis on Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland was the occurrence of major electoral contests in all three territories. Significant elections, in addition to providing an up-to-date estimation of the support parties enjoy within given territories, also provide an opportunity to discover and analyse the stance of political parties on a very wide range of issues. Throughout the data collection process, the rhetoric and public discourse of minority nationalist parties was found to differ significantly between periods of electoral involvement and periods outside of any immediate electoral campaigning.

Minority nationalist parties (and, arguably, most political parties) appeared to be mainly reactive outside of electoral periods, allow me to collect valuable information on the various ways in which the ideology and driving principles of minority nationalist parties were applied to a wide range of different political events and issues. In all three cases however, election campaigns running up to major elections (from the perspective of the parties) were particularly helpful periods to gather a very wide range data with minority nationalist parties presenting comprehensive policy platforms and commenting on each other's electoral fortunes through social media and traditional media. While the data collected outside of electoral periods was helpful to understand the evolution of party rhetoric in reaction to various political events, electoral campaigns presented a unique opportunity to collect numerous and comprehensive statements of ideology and policy from minority nationalist parties.

In all three cases, the occurrence of major electoral contests throughout the data collection process proved useful. Data collection began a month after the May 2015 United Kingdom general election, at which the Scottish National Party secured 56 out of 59 parliamentary seats in Scotland, representing a 50-seat increase from the previous general election (Turner and Boyle, 2015). Data collected a month after this event allowed me to analyse the ways in which Scottish National Party rhetoric was shaped by this newfound status as Scotland's dominant parliamentary party, a status which further reinforced the SNP's tendency to legitimise their demands by claiming to represent the interests of the Scottish people as a whole (Gayle, 2016). Similarly, the May 2016 Scottish parliamentary elections provided a further opportunity to explore the policy platform developed by the SNP.

The September 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections and the December 2015 Spanish parliamentary elections provided two major opportunities to analyse minority nationalist party in Catalonia in differing contexts. While the main minority nationalist parties in Catalonia, the CDC and ERC merged to form the *Junts Pel Sí* coalition ahead of the September 2015 elections, minority nationalist parties participated in the December 2015 elections separately – providing a great opportunity to see both the common ground shared by most Catalan minority nationalist political actors and the differences that continue to exist between these actors. In addition to providing a vast quantity of data to analyse, having two separate electoral campaigns through which to analyse minority nationalist party rhetoric in Catalonia allowed me to see the way in which this rhetoric changed and adapted to the overall enthusiasm prior and in the immediate aftermath of the September 2015 elections, and to the frustration that emerged in the months following that victory. While a simple analysis of the September 2015 election might have

conveyed a false sense of unity, continuing the data collection almost 10 months beyond that first electoral contest allowed me to factor in the continued, and sometimes growing, divisions developing with the Catalan minority nationalist movement. (Young, 2016). Similarly, data collected around the October 2017 referendum, attempted declaration of independence and subsequent Catalan parliamentary election in December 2017, provided valuable data to analyse how, if at all, Catalan minority nationalism had evolved since the start of their process towards independence in 2015.

Finally, the French territorial election in December 2015 was deemed a crucial, historic electoral contest by Corsican nationalist parties. As in the other cases, the months running up to the election date were particularly fruitful for data collection, with Corsican nationalist parties developing comprehensive policy agendas and using all possible avenues (social media, internet, local and national media) to promote and spread their message. The victory of minority nationalist parties in these elections further strengthened the data analysis process, by enabling us to analyse how Corsican nationalist parties argued for the legitimacy of their demands while in a position of power, backed up by an electoral, popular mandate. This in turn provided a great opportunity to analyse the importance of democracy and self-determination as a principle in shaping the rhetoric and action of minority nationalist parties.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the concept of triangulation, widespread in qualitative research, also forms the basis of the analysis and data collection in this thesis. Drawing upon both methodological and data triangulation, I drew upon triangulation to improve the completeness of the data collection, using interviews to obtain data that was not always easily obtainable through online sources.

The bulk of the data collected for this project was gathered from a wide variety of online sources, from official social media accounts to online local, regional or national newspapers to other news sources (both affiliated, sympathetic to and unaffiliated to minority nationalist parties in their respective territories). This data collection process yielded a very wide variety of data items, from brief social media posts, to press releases, to online videos and speeches, to media interviews and appearances, giving me a selection of written and audio-visual data to analyse. However, to compensate for the absence of certain topics in minority nationalist parties' day-to-day rhetoric, a few interviews were deemed necessary to fill some gaps that had

emerged in the online data collection process. In addition to these, these interviews also provided key minority nationalist political actors with considerably more time to expand on policy and ideological points, providing a more detailed coverage of some of the issues often briefly addressed on social media and in traditional media.

A brief explanation of the methodological considerations behind the case selection for this study was then included. As described in the introduction, minority nationalism in all three territories plays a significant role in local politics, represented by sizeable parties that have, in recent years, been in a position to compete for electoral success at the level of the territory they seek to represent. For methodological purposes, both party size and the involvement of these parties in major electoral contests throughout the data collection period proved to be particularly helpful in gathering a broad database of relevant empirical data as evidence for this study. By virtue of their size, all minority nationalist parties involved here were particularly accessible online through social media, with all parties maintaining several very active online presences. In addition to their online presence, party size can also be understood as an important factor in determining the extent to which a given party is able to access traditional, mainstream media sources, whether regional or national. With all minority nationalist movements in all three territories playing a significant political role at the scale of the territory they seek to represent, minority nationalist parties are also frequently quoted, discussed, and reported on in mainstream media sources.

Finally, the importance of regular electoral contests to the data collection process was highlighted. While the fundamental policy aims of minority nationalist parties were found to be less frequently discussed and explicitly stated outside of major electoral campaigns, the occurrence of several key elections in all three territories over the period studied provided a significant opportunity to assess the core policy platform of each party. While in no way limited to minority nationalist parties, the tendency by parties to present a more comprehensive view of their own principles, values and policies at election time was quite pronounced in the cases analysed here.

Drawing upon the theoretical framework described in the first chapter and the methods described here, the following chapter will begin to address the questions stated at the beginning of this study. Analysing self-determination as a principle and the ways in which it relates or underpins most minority nationalist party claims, the following chapter will establish self-determination not only as the fundamental *raison d'être* of these parties, but as the main driver

behind demands for, attempted and successful changes brought about by minority nationalists to the constitutional, political, economic and legal environment in which they operate.

3. Self-determination and minority nationalist identity and interests

Self-determination, as a concept, plays a central part in the rhetoric and policy platforms of minority nationalist parties in Europe. Described by SNP MEP Alyn Smith as the *'raison d'être'* or main purpose of parties like his (Appendix A, interview 7), the notion of self-determination most visibly drives a common desire for recognition and significant institutional change shared by all minority nationalist parties in this study. Self-determination, in the case of minority nationalist parties, most visibly takes the form of demands for increases in autonomy to, most frequently, full independence for the territory they claim to represent.

In the following two chapters, we will explore two different ways in which minority nationalist parties address and interact with self-determination. Understood as a norm, which, according to the United Nations should apply to 'peoples' (United Nations, 1945), self-determination can be seen to permeate almost every aspect of minority nationalist parties' rhetoric, action, and aims. In this chapter, we will begin by addressing the concept of 'people' and 'peopleness', and how minority nationalist parties draw upon and reinforce the notion that the people within the territory they seek to represent are a distinct people, with all of the rights and opportunities this entails. This, in turn, provides a strong illustration for the mutual constitution of norms or rules and agency: because minority nationalist parties promote a sub-national identity, the norm of self-determination is constituted as a legitimate norm: *'because Catalans/Corsicans/Scots are a people, they are entitled to self-determination'*. In turn, the notion that the population of their respective territories are entitled, legitimately, to pursue self-determination by virtue of their 'peopleness' informs many of the grievances, and most of the solutions, these parties promote in their day-to-day rhetoric. This chapter identifies three major types of grievances related to self-determination and 'peopleness': economic grievances, institutional grievances and identity-based grievances. While these kinds of grievances are not unique to minority nationalist parties, the understandings and norms that underpin them are clearly rooted in the notion of self-determination.

In this chapter, I begin by describing two ways in which definitions of self-determination have been extended, by drawing on the notion of 'peopleness' and on a dichotomy between 'external' and 'internal' self-determination. I then go on to detail the

various grievances held by parties in Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland, highlighting similarities in both the rhetoric used to express these grievances and in their content. Finally, I highlight how minority nationalist parties sustain and reinforce the notion of a distinct ‘peopleness’ for the populations of the territories they seek to represent, and how this rhetoric then underpins much of the rhetoric and grievances expressed by minority nationalist parties. I conclude by discussing the extent to which common grievances have produced common solutions for minority nationalist parties across the three territories, while providing some elements to understand how self-determination as a norm explains and underpins both the grievances and the solutions embraced by these parties.

Self-determination – definitions, history.

‘What is stated in big print – as the reiterated United Nations injunction: All peoples have the right to self-determination – is drastically modified by what follows in small print’(Emerson, 1971)

To best understand how the concept of self-determination is understood by minority nationalist parties and how international and domestic norms that stem from this concept might inform their rhetoric and their actions, a brief overview of the various ways in which self-determination has been defined in both international law and academia is in order. Described as ‘frustratingly ambiguous’ by Summers (2013), the understanding of self-determination in international law has also undergone significant changes throughout recent historical periods. An overview of these changes, and of the different ways in which self-determination has been conceptualised in international law, will provide a clearer picture of the variety of definitions and conceptions of self-determination that might continue to influence or inform political agents (in our case, minority nationalist parties and central governments).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, self-determination plays a significant role in studies of minority nationalist parties. However, while the importance of self-determination is often cited, the concept itself is rarely explored in significant depth. In minority nationalist party literature, self-determination, while rarely defined, is understood to be one of the fundamental concepts underpinning minority nationalist party policy choices, ‘an enduring touchstone of identification for party elites, members and voters, as well as the basis upon which a more pragmatic policy package is developed’ (Elias, 2008b, p. 29). Self-determination, understood as the basic ideology upon which minority nationalist parties are predicated, acts as an

important, although only one of many, constraints limiting the spectrum of policy choices a minority nationalist party can conduct. Similarly, literature seeking to explain the different political strategies available to minority nationalist parties also place a great deal of emphasis on self-determination as a driving concept for minority nationalist parties. Drawing on theories of multi-dimensional party competition (Rovny and Edwards, 2012; Rovny, 2013), Elias Szöcsik and Zuber (2015) develop an analytical framework in which minority nationalist parties are primarily operating along the ‘territorial dimension’ (as opposed to the ‘economic dimension’) of party politics, a dimension where policies rooted in self-determination and centre-periphery grievances play a central role. This is echoed in large part by other academics, such as Massetti and Schakel who argue that the territorial dimension, or self-determination-based policies, entirely subsume the economic dimension and the left-right orientation of minority nationalist parties. While more cautious about the role given to the economic dimension in minority nationalist party policy, Alonso, Cabeza and Gomez similarly argue that the territorial dimension of politics is primary for minority nationalist parties (Alonso, Cabeza and Gómez, 2015; Massetti and Schakel, 2015). The centrality of the territorial dimension, either in co-existence with or in domination of the economic dimension, to minority nationalist party policy-making and identity is well established in the literature. Self-determination, an important concept of territorial politics and one frequently understood to be one, if not the main ideological ‘touchstone’ of minority nationalist parties, therefore seems like a fruitful concept to explore further, to determine what different types of self-determination can exist, and, to what extent these underpin minority nationalist party thinking and policy-making. Introducing the varied and subtle understandings of self-determination found in international relations literature can provide us with a more detailed understanding of the different ways self-determination as a principle can express itself in minority nationalist party rhetoric and the different ways in which it underpins seemingly unrelated policy demands. A more fine-grained understanding of self-determination will not enable us to detail the various ways in which self-determination can generate policies at all ends of the ‘territorial dimension’ spectrum, but can also act as a useful test of the extent traditional left-right issues are subsumed by territorial, self-determination-driven demands.

Few academics attempt to provide a concise, single-sentence definition of self-determination. Sterio for instance defines self-determination as ‘the legal right for “People” to attain a certain degree of autonomy from its sovereign’ (Sterio, 2013, p. 9). However, most

academic discussions surrounding the very nature of self-determination involve several layers and several accompanying concepts that describe the different ways in which self-determination has been imagined. Buchanan, for instance, discusses self-determination as a concept taking on many different ‘forms’ and existing to various ‘degrees’ (Buchanan, 1992). In attempting to describe internal self-determination, Muharremi in his study of self-determination in Kosovo provides a baseline definition for self-determination: the pursuit of ‘political, economic social and cultural development’ for a ‘people’ (Muharremi, 2008). However, many studies drawing upon self-determination focus less on the meaning of self-determination itself as the various degrees to which self-determination can be accepted and implemented (Oklopcic, 2009 for examples of this; see Mtendeweka, 2012), and, more importantly, on the legitimacy of self-determination as an international legal concept (Philpott, 1998; see Buchanan, 2003). Building on the definition described above, Sterio similarly introduces a number of different concepts to nuance self-determination: under self-determination, ‘a group with a common identity and link to a defined territory is allowed to decide its political future in a democratic fashion’ (Sterio, 2013, p. 16). Of the various complex and contested concepts introduced in this definition, once of the most recurring and most controversial notions in the context of minority nationalist parties is the notion of ‘group with a common identity’, or ‘peopleness’.

To disentangle such complexities, most academics discussing the idea of self-determination adopt a broader approach to define the concept. Moore for instance describes three fundamental questions at the heart of self-determination: who are the ‘People’, what is the relevant territorial unit in which self-determination should be exercised by them and does self-determination have a ‘demonstration effect’, a term which Moore uses to ask whether self-determination in one instance is an isolated event, or whether it influences similar instances across space and time (Moore, 1998a). Other academics discuss whether self-determination, rather than being singular concept, can in fact represent a wide spectrum of potential policies and situations. Discussions over a potential dichotomy between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ self-determination help us to comprehend and include varied forms of ‘self-determination’ in our analysis. Discussing what many describe as the most ‘extreme’ form of self-determination (Sterio, 2013), understood as being secession or independence, academics have explored the various ways in which secession as a form of self-determination is justifiable, producing three major approaches (nationalist, choice and just-cause theories). All of these various contributions to the concept of self-determination provide us with additional tools to

understand, and eventually apply the idea of ‘self-determination’ as a contested norm or rule driving the rhetoric and actions of minority nationalist parties (and, by extension, the actions of those who interact with them in the political arena).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, self-determination plays a significant role in studies of minority nationalist parties. In minority nationalist party literature, self-determination, while rarely defined, is understood to be one of the fundamental concepts underpinning minority nationalist party policy choices, ‘an enduring touchstone of identification for party elites, members and voters, as well as the basis upon which a more pragmatic policy package is developed’ (Elias, 2008b, p. 29). Self-determination, understood as the basic ideology upon which minority nationalist parties are predicated, acts as an important, although only one of many, constraints limiting the spectrum of policy choices a minority nationalist party can conduct.

‘Peopleness’ and territory

The two definitions provided above by Sterio bring into focus two of the key elements in self-determination: a ‘people’, and a ‘territory’. Although Summers argues that the ‘people’ is undefined and likely to remain that way (Summers, 2013, p. 229), other academics have attempted to provide definitional elements to understand what, or in this case ‘who’, is entitled to self-determination. In her discussion on self-determination, Sterio describes a ‘two-pronged test’ to determine whether a group of individuals qualifies as a ‘people’: the presence of a ‘shared common ethnic, religious, historical, linguistic and cultural heritage’ and the existence of a conscious self-perception as a ‘people’ and viable political entity (Sterio, 2013). This approach, which attributes ‘peopleness’ (Sterio, 2013, p. 18) to a wide range of groups, echoes one of the initial understandings of ‘self-determination’ within the context of international law, which established politically mobilised ‘ethnic’ groups as the fundamental subject of self-determination (Moore, 1998a).

While shared linguistic, religious, cultural or ethnic characteristics play an important part in developing a ‘common identity’ (to draw from the definition of self-determination used above), the notion of ‘peopleness’ is also closely tied to the notion of ‘territory’ – for a ‘people’ to exercise ‘self-determination’ not only involves the political recognition of an identity or ‘people’ but also a claim on a given territory. Moore describes two forms of ‘people’ that interact in different ways with the notion of ‘territory’, the first being an ethnic approach which

draws upon the shared characteristics described above, and the second being a ‘civic’ conception which uses the territory as the base line for ‘peopleness’: under the ‘civic’ understanding of ‘peopleness’, everyone within a given territory belongs to the ‘people’ associated to that territory (Moore, 1998a).

Academics discussing self-determination have highlighted a number of difficulties related to the territorial, or civic approach to self-determination. While borders do play an important part in defining identities (Summers, 2013), creating a physical boundary that contributes to the definition of a group identity notably by differentiating people within the ‘border’ and people outside of it, borders need not inherently create a sufficiently homogenous group identity, making self-determination and the relationship between people and territory problematic at best. Academics highlight for instance the problem of minorities within minorities in a given territory, arguing that self-determination for a given territory might, in practice, create more minorities within the territory in question (Norman, 1998; McGarry, Keating and Moore, 2006; Summers, 2013). Another particularly relevant issue to the cases studied in this thesis is the issue of ‘shared identities’ within a given territory – while ‘the existence of a people in a given territory [often] precedes the creation of a larger mother state’ (Sterio, 2013, p. 16), the very existence of minority ‘peoples’ within a given state need not be recognised by the larger state or states within which a territory can find itself, and broader state identities can either co-exist within individuals in a given territory or be exclusively held by these individuals (Summers, 2013).

These concerns are particularly relevant in all cases studied here, where residents within Catalonia, Scotland and Corsica need not, despite being within the territory claimed as the ‘heartland’ of such identities, identify as Corsicans, Catalans or Scots. In all three cases, ‘sub-national’ identities co-exist, and are simultaneously held, with broader, state identities. In the 2011 census in Scotland, while 62% of the population of Scotland described themselves as ‘Scottish only’, 18% of the population described themselves as both British and Scottish, with 8% describing themselves as ‘British only’ (Scotland’s Census, 2011). In Catalonia, Spanish identity remains even stronger, with 19% of the population describing themselves as ‘only Catalan’, while 75% of the population described some form of dual Catalan-Spanish identity, and only 8% of the population describing themselves as ‘only Spanish’ in a 2015 poll for Spanish newspaper *El País* (El País, 2015). While such studies are rare in Corsica, a 1999 survey indicated that 45% of the population describes themselves as ‘French above all else’, with 36% of the population describing themselves as ‘Corsican above all else’ (Polloni, 2012)

It is reasonable to assume that the proportion of people identifying as Corsican might have increased in the near 20 years since this poll was conducted, but it is also safe to assume that both the French and Corsican identities continue to co-exist, frequently simultaneously, on the island today.

External vs internal self-determination

While questions of over the definition of ‘people’ and the relationship between ‘people’ and territory are central to understanding self-determination as a principle, academics have developed additional ways through which to understand the many subtleties and to disentangle the complexity of the concept. In addition to discussing ‘who’ or ‘what’ exactly can claim a right to self-determination, most academics working on the concept have come to understand it as a spectrum of possibilities, as opposed to single, binary concept (self-determined/not self-determined). We will begin here by addressing the distinction made between external and internal self-determination, before moving on to the various theories discussing the conditions and requirements of legitimate self-determination.

Discussing the identification of a ‘people’, Sterio argues:

is not simultaneous with the conclusion that any people deserves the right to self-govern in an independent manner, as a single, separate state, through the exercise of external self-determination. Rather, the identification of a group as a people signals that the group deserves rights, which can be fulfilled equally well within the central mother state, through so-called *internal* self-determination (Sterio, 2013, p. 18).

A concise definition of internal self-determination was also established by the Canadian Supreme Court in the landmark *Re Secession of Quebec* case in 1997. In that judgement, internal self-determination is described as ‘a people’s pursuit of its political, economic, social and cultural development within the framework of an existing state’ (CanLII, 1998). The same judgement then quotes the United Nations *Declaration on Friendly Relations* of 1970 to define external self-determination as ‘the establishment of a sovereign and independent state’ (CanLII, 1998). Based on this understanding, internal self-determination concerns primarily domestic, constitutional arrangements regarding autonomous, sub-national government within a given territory, while external self-determination solely concerns the secession of a given territory from a state.

Summers provides a slightly different understanding of the dichotomy, focusing on perspectives and context as opposed to a clear autonomy/secession dichotomy. Summers argues that the ‘internal-external division relates to emphasis and perspective’: focusing on relationships and connections, self-determination could be exercised internally in relation to certain actors, and externally in relation to others. Summers for instance argues that minority nationalists might, in practice, see their relationship with central government as an exercise of ‘external self-determination’ – understood as the interaction between two distinct and politically recognised ‘peoples’, as opposed to an interaction between a government and subordinate actors (Summers, 2013). Based on this understanding, any activity considered or perceived to be outside of the hierarchical, constitutional, or domestic realm of the state can be understood as an act of ‘external self-determination’.

In addition to this, Summers questions the usefulness of the dichotomy as described by the *Re Secession of Quebec* judgement. Summers argues that the distinction, rather than being a simple analytical tool, also significantly limits any claim to a right to external self-determination. For Summers, the creation of an internal-external dichotomy within self-determination primarily allows us to identify alternatives to secession frequently associated with self-determination. In this context, differentiating between internal and external self-determination can enable states to reject secessionist claims in cases where ‘internal’ self-determination exists (Summers, 2013). As we will see later in the chapter, while the dichotomy between internal and external self-determination can be useful to analyse the aims of minority nationalist parties and their motivations regarding self-determination, the distinction itself is not one that can be found frequently in the vocabulary of minority nationalist parties.

Both understandings of external and internal self-determination allow us to better understand the ways in which minority nationalist parties interact with their central government and how they interact, either directly or indirectly, with each other.

Establishing ‘peopleness’

As we have seen above, ‘peopleness’ is one of the pre-requisites of self-determination: with no ‘peopleness’, self-determination is, according to most current and international legal understandings of the term, irrelevant and inapplicable.

In the case of minority nationalist parties, this means that, for the norm ‘Catalans/Corsicans/Scots should be granted self-determination’ to be defended as legitimate,

an additional norm, which can simply be stated as ‘Catalans/Corsicans/Scots should be recognised as a distinct “people”, with all the rights and opportunities this entails’, needs to exist and needs to be promoted by minority nationalist parties. However, this study does not claim that minority nationalist political parties are the sole ‘norm entrepreneurs’ creating and promoting a sense of distinct ‘peopleness’. While the source of such an idea (and of the norm that stems from it) is hard to pinpoint and is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is clear that a very wide range of different agents are responsible and contribute to the creation, revival or sustaining of the cultural, historical, social and territorial elements that are drawn upon to create the notion of a distinct, sub-national identity in these territories. These agents range from political parties, civil society organisations and other political groups to musicians, film makers, artists and athletes – all of whom can, in various ways, contribute to the construction of a new sub-national identity or the promotion and protection of an existing one.

If ‘peopleness’ is a pre-requisite for legitimate access to self-determination, it is important to determine how, and in what contexts, minority nationalist parties can draw upon this notion of distinct ‘peopleness’ to argue that the people within the territory they seek to represent are legitimate recipients and practitioners of self-determination, with all the normative implications this contains.

The notion of ‘peopleness’ is relatively uncontroversial in Scotland today. Due to the historical circumstances surrounding its union with England in the early 18th century, Scotland has been able to sustain a shared cultural, linguistic, religious and historical heritage with more or less success and stability. The notion of ‘self-perception as a people and a viable political entity’ is harder to pin down, however a number of points could arguably support both a clear self-perception as a ‘people’ and a self-perception as a viable political entity. Regarding self-perception as a ‘people’, national identity data from the 2011 census used above shows that 80% of people in Scotland identify as ‘Scottish’. Although 18% people do identify as both Scottish and British, there is a strong, distinct identity perceived by people in Scotland (this identity can, for instance, be easily seen in the case of sports) (Scotland’s Census, 2011). With regard to political viability, support for both devolution (74.3% of voters backed the introduction of Scottish Parliament in 1997) (Dewdney, 1997) and a minority nationalist party such as the SNP shows that a significant portion of the population in Scotland believes that the ‘Scottish people’ can legitimately and viably exercise at the very least a degree of self-government through devolved institutions (with opinions varying on the suitable extent of this).

‘Peopleness’ remains a central element in the day-to-day rhetoric of the SNP. With the exception of the months following the 2015 General Election, during which the SNP adopted a more UK-wide rhetorical approach based on fundamental opposition to David Cameron’s governmental policy, SNP rhetoric throughout my period of study and in the subsequent months and years up to the time of writing has focused on ‘Scotland’ and, more importantly, on the ‘Scottish people’. References to both ‘standing up for Scotland’ and ‘the people of Scotland’ are very frequent for instance in the various manifestos published by the SNP throughout 2015 and 2016 (Scottish National Party, 2015q, 2016b), and general discourse around the European Union membership referendum emphasises the ‘Scottish people’ as having a distinct opinion, and distinct political significance with regards to the results of the referendum and its implementation.

While SNP policy is (sometimes strongly) opposed by both the UK Labour and Conservative parties, its continuous mobilisation of Scottish ‘peopleness’ in political rhetoric and discourse remains uncontroversial. Few, if any, politicians in the United Kingdom question or challenge the existence of a Scottish people, and few challenge the SNP for its focus on that category of people. On the contrary, the notion of a distinct Scottish people as a politically relevant and viable entity has become common across most political parties operating in Scotland, with the Conservative Party, Labour Party and Liberal Democrats maintaining a Scottish identity distinct from their counterparts in England – by maintaining Scotland-specific names (Scottish Conservatives, Scottish Labour Party and Scottish Liberal Democrats respectively), distinct leaderships, separate web pages, and, in the case of the Scottish Conservatives, a different visual identity from its UK-wide counterpart.

The notion of a ‘Catalan people’, and the political mobilisation of this category of people as politically relevant and viable is also recurrent notion and phenomenon across all minority nationalist parties in Catalonia. This is particularly visible in the day to day rhetoric of both major minority nationalist parties, ERC and the former CDC (now PDeCAT) and in the rhetoric of the electoral coalition *Junts Pel Sí*, the coalition composed of both the ERC and CDC created specifically to stand on a pro-independence platform for the September 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections. Rhetoric surrounding Catalan independence makes frequent use of ‘Catalans’ as a distinct category of people (see *Junts Pel Sí*, 2015a, 2015b for examples of this). Pro-independence parties frequently described their efforts as an attempt to ‘create a

new country for all Catalans’ (Convergents - CDC, 2015c; Junqueras, 2015a; Junts Pel Sí, 2015c), while others described the success of pro-independence parties in the September 2015 elections as evidence of the ‘strength of the Catalan people’ as opposed to the ‘powers of the Spanish state’ (Junts Pel Sí, 2015i).

The question of the boundaries and conditions for belonging to ‘the Catalan people’, and the question of who exactly could be considered as a ‘Catalan’, also shows the importance of ‘peopleness’ as a legitimising element in the rhetoric of Catalan minority nationalists. In a variety of social media posts, the ERC argued that belonging to the ‘Catalan people’ was not a question of birth or language. Anyone could be Catalan so long as he or she wishes to ‘contribute to its prosperity’ or ‘build a common future’ in Catalonia’ (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, 2015b, 2015a). Similar rhetoric emphasised ‘a shared project’ as a crucial criterion for ‘Catalan-ness’ (Junts Pel Sí, 2015d). As in the case of Scotland and Corsica, Catalan minority nationalists legitimise their policy platform and describe themselves as being in the service, or in the interests of, a specific category of people within a specific territorially-defined nation.

The question of distinct peopleness in Corsica is perhaps the most controversial across all three cases. While similar historical, cultural, linguistic elements required to create a sense of ‘peopleness’ exist in Corsica, the notion of a distinct people within France clashes with a fundamental constitutional rule, reinforced by legal constitutional decisions brought about specifically by Corsican demands for a fully recognised status as a distinct people within the French Republic (see Noiriél, 1988 and Germain and Lassalle, 2006 for studies of France’s approach to communities and immigration). Whereas in Scotland the notion of ‘peopleness’ is relatively unproblematic, the notion of Corsican ‘peopleness’ clashes directly with very long-standing and established constitutional rules establishing, and protecting, what is often perceived as an exclusive French ‘people’ (Assemblée Nationale, 2017).

The norm according to which the French ‘people’ should not be sub-divided into communitarian categories can be found codified in Article 1 of the 1958 French Constitution, which states: ‘The French Republic is one and indivisible, *laïque*, democratic and social. She ensures equality before the law for all citizens, with no distinction made of origin, race or religion’ (Assemblée Nationale, 2017). This article, one of the fundamental definitional articles establishing the very nature of the French Republic, has a number of major implications for the recognition of minorities within the French population. These implications were further

strengthened by decisions taken by the French Constitutional Council in response to efforts made to recognise Corsicans as a distinct people – when a 1991 law establishing a special administrative status for Corsica described the ‘Corsican people as a component of the French people’, the French Constitutional Council reiterated that this would be in violation of Article 1 of the French Constitution, insofar as it introduces a subdivision within the undividable French Republic (Chicot, 2000).

In contrast to the lack of public recognition emanating from the French central government, the notion of a distinct ‘peopleness’ for Corsicans, is, similarly to Catalonia and Scotland, a fundamental part of minority nationalist party rhetoric. Throughout the period analysed, prior to that period and beyond, the notion of a ‘Corsican’ people is repeatedly and continuously invoked by Corsican minority nationalists to describe the people on behalf of whom Corsican nationalists believe they act. To provide an example, the electoral victory secured by Corsican nationalists at the regional level in Corsica in December 2015 led to a number of high profile debates and exchanges between French politicians, journalists and Corsican nationalist leaders on the existence (or not) of a ‘Corsican people’. Gilles Simeoni, for instance, described the existence of a ‘Corsican people’ as an ‘objective reality’, describing rejections of such an idea by the French central government as ‘denying the obvious’ (see Simeoni interviewed on BFM TV, 2015; Cochard, 2016 for identical statements across various media platforms around the same period; Huffington Post, 2016).

As in Catalonia, the question of the boundary of ‘Corsican peopleness’ is particularly relevant. Considering the split identities found in Corsica (as seen above), Corsican nationalists provide, with few variations due to context, the same answer as that provided by Catalan nationalists. Answering allegations of racism within Corsican nationalism, Gilles Simeoni described how, ‘for centuries, men and women have arrived on this island, regardless of their origin, their skin colour, their religion, and they integrated, became fully part of our people’ (Simeoni cited in L’Indépendant, 2015; Le Point, 2015). Echoing this, Jean-Guy Talamoni described the notion of a ‘Corsican people’ as including ‘native Corsicans’ and ‘adoptive Corsicans’, a conception which he describes as very ‘open’ (Appendix A, interview 3). Despite this however, Talamoni estimates that approximately half of the island’s population cannot be considered to be a part of the ‘Corsican people’. Most notably, he excludes those who are in Corsica as a result of temporary French civil service postings, whether administrative workers or members of the armed forces and the emergency services. While this number represents approximately 10% of the Corsican population (L’Internaute, 2018), Talamoni also, albeit

implicitly, includes many of the temporary seasonal workers who contribute to the islands tourism industry, or what he terms the ‘residential economy’, a number estimated to be around 15000 to 20000 (Corse-Matin, 2017). While no figure suggests that half of the population in Corsica can be safely considered temporary, economic residents, the suggestion that both temporary French civil servants and other temporary economic residents in Corsica are not fundamentally integrated into a Corsican ‘people’ shows a similar emphasis placed on permanent residence and overall social, economic, and personal commitment as one of the markers of belonging to the ‘people’ as the one found in Catalan minority nationalist parties.

Despite local contextual variations, one of the ways in which ‘peopleness’ is drawn upon by minority nationalist parties in all three cases is in the rhetorical distance placed between ‘the people’ from the territory they claim to represent and the ‘state’ within which they currently find themselves. In addition to distance, minority nationalist parties often refer to their government at the sub-national level as a partner, rather than as a subordinate institution to the central government. SNP rhetoric frequently opposed the interests of the Scottish people and Scotland with the policies carried out at the UK-government level by the Conservative Party (Scottish National Party, 2015e), and frequently describes its work with the UK-government as ‘intergovernmental’ work, or ‘negotiations’, a relatively uncontroversial terminology in the United Kingdom, with similar terminology being used for instance in the Smith Commission report (Smith Commission, 2014). Similarly in Corsica, minority nationalists in Corsica frequently try to establish their government as a distinct partner of the French government, as opposed to a subordinate institution. A good illustration of this is the short, provocative statement issued by Corsican nationalist and President of the Corsican Assembly Jean-Guy Talamoni, describing France as a ‘friend’ of Corsica during a visit to the French government in 2016 (de Boni, 2016). In the run-up to the 2015 regional elections in France, other elements of rhetoric presented Corsica as being ‘close to France’, but a ‘nation’ in itself (Corsica Radio, 2015), while much of the project and purpose of supporting the nationalists in the elections was presented as enabling ‘Corsicans’ to ‘impose reforms on Paris’, with ‘Paris’ seen to mean the French government as an external actor as opposed to a domestic, hierarchical superior (Alta Frequenza, 2015e; Corsica Radio, 2015). In Catalonia, the Spanish state is frequently presented as an external opponent to the ‘Catalan people’, with frequent calls for ‘negotiations’ being made by Catalan nationalists to negotiate either a referendum on independence or independence itself (Junts Pel Sí, 2015g, 2015i). Oriol Junqueras, leader of

the ERC party in Catalonia, for instance described his primary opponent as ‘a state that works tirelessly against Catalonia’ (Junqueras, 2015b), while Raul Romeva, leader of the *Junts Pel Sí* electoral coalition, described Spain’s Constitutional Court as a politicized tribunal working against the interests and decisions of the Catalan people (Romeva i Rueda, 2015c). In all three cases, the central government of France, Spain and the United Kingdom are considered, with varying degrees of hostility and opposition, as external actors – unlike many other regions or territories with little to no nationalist politics, minority nationalist parties in government in Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland place their governments outside of the national-subnational hierarchy which usually characterises the relationship between national governments and regional or local administrations.

By creating, or sustaining, a distinct ‘peopleness’ for the people they claim to represent, minority nationalist parties legitimise self-determination as a solution to many of the grievances they put forward. By continuously constituting their respective ‘peoples’ as a real, relevant and legitimate category in discourse, minority nationalist parties contribute to the creation and promotion of the idea that the people they seek to represent in their respective territories are distinct from the larger ‘people’ represented by the central government of the state they find themselves in today. In all cases, this creates, and legitimises, an almost inevitably associated norm that can be stated in this manner: *‘the existence of a distinct Corsican/Catalan/Scottish people should be recognised as a reality’*. As with all norms, the notion of life cycle can be used to understand the varying extent to which such a norm is accepted in the United Kingdom, France and Spain, leading to a different emphasis within minority nationalist discourse. In the case of Scotland, the notion of ‘Scottish people’ is frequently used and accepted by nationalists and non-nationalists alike, and can be seen as an ‘internalised’ norm that is almost beyond contestation and certainly not the source of continuous political debate. At the other side of the spectrum of a norm’s life cycle, Corsican nationalists frequently need to address the existence of a Corsican ‘people’, engaging in persuasion in an attempt to convince a sufficient number of ‘critical agents’ to achieve recognition at the level of the French state. In all three cases, the discourse of minority nationalist parties and the norm of ‘peopleness’ they seek to promote and establish reinforce each other in a process of mutual constitution, with agent discourse changing relative to the overall acceptance among critical agents of the norm they have adopted.

In addition to this, the adoption of distinct ‘peopleness’ forms the building block of several major grievances put forward by minority nationalist parties. By drawing on self-

determination as a right granted to all people, minority nationalist parties have developed economic, institutional and identity-based grievances which, for the most part, can be resolved through the implementation of better, or more, self-determination. It is to these grievances that I turn my attention now.

‘Internal self-determination’ and minority nationalist grievances

In all three cases studied in this thesis, minority nationalist parties pursue significant institutional and constitutional changes in their respective states. Ranging from a potentially drastic expansion in autonomy in the case of moderate nationalists in Corsica to outright independence for radical nationalists in Corsica as well as nationalists in Catalonia and Scotland, all minority nationalist parties studied in this case seek either ‘external’ self-determination or a radical change in the provision of ‘internal’ self-determination within the state to which they currently belong. These similar goals, despite (sometimes significantly) different political contexts in the states within which these parties operate, can be perceived as being rooted in a common dissatisfaction with the characteristics or the extent of ‘internal’ self-determination tolerated or provided by the central government.

An analysis of the various grievances put forward by minority nationalist parties in three major areas (economy, institutions, identity) further strengthens the notion that self-determination, and ‘peopleness’, are the building blocks of most, if not all, other policy considerations put forward by these parties. While similar grievances and, in some cases, similar discourses, can be found across all three cases, a close study of the rhetoric of these parties as well as the normative political context they operate in allows us to determine a degree of hierarchy between grievances, which nonetheless places institutional, or self-determination-driven grievances and demands at their core.

However, because different political contexts and normative frameworks mean that the norms being challenged by minority nationalist parties, and the normative gap that exists between the norms supported by central government and those put forward by minority nationalists are different in each case, the salience of each of the three types of grievances varies in minority nationalist discourse. In this case, we can see mutual constitution at work again: while all minority nationalist parties share a common commitment to self-determination, the normative and rules-based frameworks within which they operate (the structure) influences these parties’ interests as expressed through their rhetoric.

The following section will draw on examples of rhetoric from throughout 2015, 2016 and 2017 to highlight the different ways in which minority nationalists have presented their grievances to the public. This equates to attempting to persuade a key critical agent for norm adoption, the electorate. As we will see, while institutional grievances appear salient in the rhetoric of all minority nationalist parties, the extent to which economic grievances and identity grievances are present, and the way in which they are presented, varies across cases.

Scotland

Identity-based grievances

The overall acceptance of Scottish ‘peopleness’, as well as a consensus on linguistic issues, contribute to the relative non-salience of identity-based grievances in the discourse and policies of the SNP.

The historical context surrounding Scotland’s place in the United Kingdom provides some explanations as to why identity-based grievances remain secondary today. Whereas, historically, both Catalonia and Corsica were coercively absorbed into broader, unitary nation-states, Scotland entered into a larger union with England and Wales, retaining its judicial, educational and religious systems as well as a distinct civil society. In the words of Soule, Leith and Steven, ‘in terms of public cultural activity, a continuity of Scottish institutions and traditions persisted enabling the Scottish middle class to continue to enact Scottish ways of being.’ (Soule, Leith and Steven, 2012, p. 2). The continued existence of a distinct society, and therefore a distinct identity, contrasts starkly with the homogenising tendencies of both the Spanish and French states, as best exemplified by their attitude to minority languages (see previous chapter). Other examples of this continued distinctiveness could also be found in other domains such as the arts, or sports, where the existence of separate, ‘sub-national’ teams representing all four of the United Kingdom’s ‘nations’, continues to be a global exception and an important vector for the affirmation of national identity (comparatively, the existence of such ‘sub-national’ sports teams in Corsica and Catalonia continues to be unrecognised and politically sensitive).

The question of language, which appears so central to the identity-based grievances of many minority nationalist movements including those in Catalonia and Corsica, also plays a minor and relatively uncontroversial role within the SNP’s rhetoric. The position and rhetorical importance granted to Scottish Gaelic within SNP rhetoric provides a strong example of the

secondary nature of language as a basis for identity-based grievances in Scotland. While spoken by only a very small proportion of the overall population of Scotland (1.1%) (REF), Scottish Gaelic benefits from a significant symbolic recognition, notably through the Gaelic Board (the institution monitoring Gaelic and implementing language policy) and its commitment to establishing Gaelic as a language equal in status to English (Paterson and O’Hanlon, 2014).

Despite this symbolic importance however, the presence of Gaelic language policies or issues in SNP rhetoric remains relatively limited. As an example, the Gaelic language is virtually absent from SNP leaflets, manifestos or social media. SNP Scottish Parliament election manifestos are not available in Gaelic, and the party website itself does not include a full Gaelic translation: only a single bilingual page could be found, discussing the SNP’s stance on Gaelic (Scottish National Party, 2017). Similarly, virtually none of the party’s communication on social media included Gaelic. Throughout the data collection period for this study, the SNP Twitter account issued messages almost exclusively in English, while all major party speeches, interventions, press releases and media appearances are conducted in English too. Gaelic-language interventions from SNP elected officials were frequently limited to elected officials from Gaelic heartlands, such as the Western Isles, and often on topics directly related to Gaelic education or Gaelic language development (see BBC News, 2016a for an example of this - Allasdair Allan MSP addresses BBC Alba in Gaelic). However, even in Gaelic heartlands, SNP communication appears to be primarily conducted in the English language (see Electionleaflets.org, 2010 for a 2010 SNP leaflet from the Western Isles).

Substantially, Gaelic language policy does not appear to be a major point for the SNP, appearing generally less frequently and in more broad terms than what can be seen in other cases. The 1999 SNP manifesto mentions Gaelic only 3 times, highlighting the SNP’s commitment to promoting the Gaelic and Scots languages’ recognition as part of Scotland’s heritage and Gaelic-medium education. A further mention is made of supporting Gaelic language arts, alongside ‘art and culture expressed in other languages in common use in Scotland’ (Scottish National Party, 1999). The 2003 manifesto addressed Gaelic language issues more prominently, with a commitment to establishing a ‘Languages Act’ providing a ‘secure status for the Gaelic and Scots language’ (Scottish National Party, 2003). The commitment included the establishment of a Gaelic Language Board as a statutory body, as well as commitments to promote the learning of Gaelic ‘as a second language’ in schools and in adulthood (Scottish National Party, 2003). Similar commitments to sustaining Gaelic and

improving Gaelic education are reiterated in the 2007, 2011 and 2016 manifestos, with recurrent commitments to improving Gaelic's profile and sustaining it as a community language where it is currently used as such (Scottish National Party, 2007, 2011, 2016b).

There are several possible reasons to explain the relative absence of Gaelic from the SNP's rhetoric and from its policy platform. The first explanation focuses on the minority status of Gaelic even within Scotland. As described above, Gaelic language speakers represent a small minority of the overall Scottish population. For this reason, there appears to be little reason for the SNP to grant a significant place to Gaelic language issues in a manifesto aimed at an electorate which, by and large, has no direct stake in the day-to-day practice and use of Gaelic.

However, aside from the minority status of Gaelic, the lack of SNP focus on Gaelic language issues within its rhetoric can be a sign of normative alignment between the existing legal and political framework regulating language policies in Scotland and the normative stance of the SNP on the issue. As described above, the SNP's last major institutional demand relating to Gaelic language policy dates back to 2003, and the demand for a statutory government agency controlling Gaelic language policy. The demand itself was broadly satisfied in 2005 under a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition with the Gaelic Language Act, establishing a statutory body called Bòrd na Gàidhlig, or the Gaelic Board, with wide ranging powers in terms of promoting the use of Gaelic in public bodies in Scotland (Rogers and McLeod, 2007). Although SNP amendments granting 'equal validity' to Gaelic were rejected in favour of 'equal respect', the Act itself was supported unanimously in the Scottish Parliament (BBC News, 2005).

While the SNP cannot be uniquely credited as the agent behind the official recognition of Gaelic in the 2005 Act, the Act built upon the decentralisation of linguistic issues in Britain to provide a significant set of tools for the promotion of Gaelic at the Scottish governmental level. While SNP commitments to Gaelic remained marginal in subsequent manifestos, the SNP once in government following the 2011 elections were able to enhance Gaelic language policy provisions by using the tools brought into existence by the Act and the Bòrd.

One the most important powers granted to the Bòrd is the ability for it to request 'Gaelic Language Plans', or policy documents detailing measures to promote and protect Gaelic, from individual government and other public institutions (Walsh and McLeod, 2008). In addition to the baseline National Gaelic Language Plans describe above, a wide range of Scottish governmental institutions have also been asked to, and have produced, Gaelic Language Plans

of their own. The Gaelic Language Plans adopted by the Scottish Government since 2007 act as an important illustration of the ways in which the SNP-led Scottish government believes Gaelic should be promoted across Scotland. In both plans, covering 2010 to 2015 and 2016 to 2021 respectively, the SNP-led government can be seen to undertake a very wide range of measures promoting the visibility of Gaelic across Scotland and the use of Gaelic in public life in core speaker areas, altering significantly both the image of the Scottish Government from the perspective of ordinary citizens and the practice of the Scottish Government in relation to Gaelic language provision. The 2010 language plan for instance committed the Scottish Government to the introduction of Gaelic language equivalents within most of the Government's visual identity elements, including official logos, letterheads, institutional names and government property signage (The Scottish Government, 2010). Several other provisions in the 2010 plan focus on making Gaelic a usable language for citizens to interact with the Government, improving Gaelic language training for Government customer service staff, providing Gaelic language forms, and providing Gaelic language translations of Government documents when requested (The Scottish Government, 2010). Building in large part on the 2010 plan, the plan adopted in 2016 further reinforces the visibility of Gaelic on Government properties, reinforcing Government communication in Gaelic, improving Gaelic usage in online resources and improving staff training to facilitate the provision of Government services in Gaelic (The Scottish Government, 2016). In addition to Gaelic language policies concerning core Government practices, the plan also highlights a range of commitments by the Scottish Government on the broader promotion of Gaelic in society, including a commitment to bilingual signage 'on a new or replacement basis', a commitment to further funding for Gaelic education and a commitment to the further use of Gaelic in national advertising and communication campaigns (The Scottish Government, 2016).

Analysed using the lens of norm diffusion and the norm life cycle, the norm that can be stated as 'Gaelic should be recognised as a valuable part of Scottish identity and given equal visibility to English in Scotland' is at the very least close to reaching the final stage of its life cycle, that of internalisation. Far from being the basis for identity-driven grievances, language (and specifically the place of Scottish Gaelic) appears to be an object of normative consensus across most, if not all, political actors in Scotland and the United Kingdom. The unanimous adoption of the 2005 Act provided a strong illustration of the consensus surrounding the need to promote and safeguard Gaelic, and the SNP has embraced and used all of the institutional tools provided by the Act to enthusiastically promote Gaelic not only within its core territories,

but across Scotland. Using its position in government, the SNP has been able to legitimately and significantly alter the public image of Scottish Government institutions, granting Gaelic an almost equal place to English in many of the public-facing elements of the Scottish Government.

Comparatively to the other two cases analysed below, the SNP's focus on Gaelic in public party rhetoric is limited. Broadly satisfied with the institutional framework surrounding Gaelic language policy at the Scottish Government level, the SNP has focused on using its position as the governing party of Scotland to implement changes within the remit of the Bòrd and its National Gaelic Language Plan, granting many of the changes made by the SNP a significant degree of legal, institutional and political legitimacy. With demands for self-determination in the realm of language broadly met, identity-based grievances based on language remain minimal in SNP rhetoric.

Due to the nature of Scotland's relationship with and position within the United Kingdom, the consensus around the recognition of Scottish 'peopleness' as a legitimate identity and due to the relatively marginal position of language as a vector of identity in Scotland (despite it being a significant and sensitive part of identity in our other cases), the of Scottish national identity being under threat or attack, common within Corsica and Catalonia, is absent from SNP discourse. This however does not imply that national identity plays no part in the SNP's rhetoric; the national category of 'Scots' is frequently used by the SNP in their rhetoric to differentiate Scotland, and the Scottish electorate and government, from its UK counterparts. The notion that the SNP is a party representing all 'Scots' and 'standing for Scotland's best interests' or for 'what is best for Scotland' is a central element in the party's rhetoric, and is frequently referred to in manifestos, speeches and other appearances. Manifestos, and the debates around Scotland's position following the EU referendum, are clear examples of this (Scottish National Party, 2016b; Cheyne, 2017).

However, despite the SNP's use of national identity to mobilise voters and frame economic and institutional matters alike, national identity in itself is rarely the source of specific, identity-based grievances as seen in Catalonia and particularly in Corsica. While Corsican national identity is primarily endorsed by minority nationalist parties and a frequent point of tension between Corsican nationalists and their opponents both in Corsica and within the French state, Scottish national identity remains relatively uncontroversial, and broadly

adopted by all political parties in Scotland (Soule, Leith and Steven, 2012). Considering this, the historical context and the political framework establishing Scotland as a distinct entity, there appears to be little ground, and indeed little need, for the SNP to focus on identity-driven grievances as a pre-requisite for self-determination and recognition.

Institutional grievances

Over the period spent analysing the SNP's policies from May 2015 to June 2016, two major institutional or constitutional grievances played a central part in the SNP's rhetoric. In May 2015, the Scottish National Party was facing its first electoral test since the 'No' vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. While the result was deemed a significant blow to the SNP's pursuit of independence, it was also characterised by a political campaign which granted political momentum to the SNP, raising it to the strong levels of support that it enjoyed in the months running up to the election and to its historic 2015 General Election results (Dennison, 2015). Throughout that period and in the months following the 2015 General Election, the primary focus of the SNP's rhetoric and action on institutional or constitutional issues was the devolution of further powers to the Scottish parliament and government following promises made to that effect by British Prime Minister David Cameron, deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and leader of the Labour Party Ed Miliband shortly before the 2014 independence referendum (Clegg, 2014; Page, 2015; McHarg, 2016).

With the aftermath of the 2014 'No' vote in the Scottish independence referendum rendering external self-determination (independence) an impossible aim for the SNP in the short term, the party focused primarily on campaigning for a more advanced form of internal self-determination than what was granted at the time to Scotland as 'nation' in the United Kingdom. Campaigning ahead of the 2015 General Election, SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon focused the party's message on making 'Westminster sit up and take notice' (Scottish National Party, 2015h), focusing on a strong anti-establishment message targeting the United Kingdom government for what the SNP perceived was an inadequate response and follow-up to the plans for further devolution that were highlighted in the run-up to the independence referendum in 2014.

Much of the SNP's rhetoric focused on the proposals made by the Smith Commission in a report published on the 27th November 2014, which sought to set out the ways in which further powers could be devolved to the Scottish authorities. The Smith Commission, created

as a response to the aforementioned promises made by major British parties in the run-up to the independence referendum (Himsworth, 2016, p. 362) published a report after two months of consultations between major British parties, the SNP and both the UK and Scottish governments (Smith Commission, 2014; Eden, 2016). The report recommended three major developments in the institutional arrangements in Scotland. The first, and perhaps the most institutionally significant (strictly speaking), was a recommendation to establish both the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government as permanent features of the United Kingdom's institutional design, with stronger, more transparent and more systematic inter-governmental work between the Scottish and the United Kingdom government (Smith Commission, 2014, p. 5; Page, 2015). While the removal or reversal of devolution was unlikely to be considered a realistic prospect in the short or medium term regardless of this recommendation, establishing both the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government as permanent features of the United Kingdom's institutional design responded to a demand by the SNP-led Scottish Government to provide greater legal and statutory certainty to the devolved institutions, rendering any top-down abolition of devolution legally impossible (Himsworth, 2016, p. 362). In addition to this, the Smith Commission report recommended a statutory footing for what had become known as the 'Sewel Convention', according to which the UK government would refrain from legislating on devolved matters in Scotland without the approval of the Scottish institutions (Smith Commission, 2014, p. 13). Although, as noted by Page in his analysis of the Smith Commission report, these recommendations did not fundamentally challenge the notion of UK government sovereignty over Scotland, establishing the Scottish institutions as permanent and the Sewel Convention in law provided clear constitutional boundaries, limiting the spectrum of possible policies for the United Kingdom government both in terms of devolved policy areas in Scotland but also with regard to the very nature of Scotland's devolved institutions (Page, 2015).

The other two 'pillars' for further devolution identified in the Smith report focused primarily on economic and social matters, addressing some of the economic grievances carried by the SNP to which I will return below. In the second pillar, the Smith Commission recommended a significant expansion of the Scottish Government's powers in the field of welfare, with powers including setting the frequency and rate of many benefits including carers' allowance, disability benefits, winter fuel payments, housing benefit (and the housing element of the Universal Credit when implemented) and the symbolic 'under-occupancy charge' or 'bedroom tax', and the ability to create new benefits in areas of devolved

competence (Page, 2015, pp. 235–6; Mullen, 2016, p. 382). This pillar, which the Smith Commission report labelled as ‘delivering prosperity, a healthy economy, jobs and social justice’ (Smith Commission, 2014), represented a significant change in a number of important aspects related to both institutional and economic grievances raised by the SNP. Politically, by shifting control over a large number of different welfare payments to the Scottish authorities, the Smith report recommendations moved an important, day-to-day, administrative contact point between the public and government administrations away from UK institutions towards devolved institutions (Mullen, 2016, p. 383). The devolution of sections of welfare also provided leeway for the SNP-led Scottish government to address some of the more significant economic grievances surrounding differences in opinion with the UK government over budgetary and welfare policy. The devolution of welfare recommended in the report, alongside all other recommendations, would provide the Scottish government with control over 60% of public expenditure in Scotland, with Mullen identifying more specifically that 15.3% of welfare expenditure previously exclusively controlled by the UK government would then be devolved to the Scottish authorities (Page, 2015; Mullen, 2016).

Considering the potentially significant increases in expenditure brought about by the Smith Commission’s proposals for welfare devolution, the third ‘pillar’, perhaps unsurprisingly, addressed the issue of tax devolution. The recommendations of the Smith Commission report included wide ranging ideas such as allowing the Scottish government to set non-dividend and non-savings income tax rates, as well as allowing the government to retain up to the first ten percentage points of VAT taxation raised in Scotland (Page, 2015, p. 236). Overall, Page identifies that, while Scotland would be responsible for up to 60% of welfare expenditure as described above, the Scottish government would also, under the Smith Commission recommendations, retain 40% of tax raised in Scotland (Page, 2015, p. 236). The gap between expenditure and tax income would continue to be filled by block grants from the UK government calculated under the ‘Barnett Formula’, a convention according to which UK government funding for devolved administration is based on population figures and the extent of devolved powers – and adjusted as population figures change (Select Committee on the Barnett Formula, 2009). Alongside the devolution of tax powers, the Smith Commission recommended an increase in independent budgetary scrutiny and increased borrowing powers for the Scottish government to match the increased financial responsibility (Page, 2015), as well as a ‘no detriment principle’, according to which further devolution of expenditure ought to be matched by an increase in UK government funding for the devolved institutions, while

devolution of tax income ought to be matched by a reduction of the same funding (Smith Commission, 2014, pp. 25–26).

The SNP's rhetoric in 2015 and in early 2016 on institutional issues focused primarily on the implementation of the Smith Commission recommendations, and on the negotiations surrounding the implementation of these recommendations in the form of the Scotland Act 2016. While SNP criticism of the Smith Commission report remained relatively muted throughout the period, the general view from the party was that the Smith Commission recommendations, although welcome, did not go far enough in providing full fiscal responsibility to the Scottish government and further devolved powers. Criticism of the report began soon after its publication in late 2014, with Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon criticising for instance what was perceived as the limited control given over welfare to the Scottish government, and encouraging voters to use the 2015 General Election to vote SNP and demand further powers (Brooks, 2014). This commitment was subsequently reflected in the SNP's 2015 General Election manifesto, demanding that 'the proposals of the Smith Commission are delivered quickly and in full', adding that these proposals do not 'go far enough to honour the promises made during the referendum' (Scottish National Party, 2015q).

However, as the first drafts of what would become the Scotland Act 2016 emerged and as negotiations over their content began, the SNP's rhetoric shifted slightly, adopting the Smith Commission as a benchmark that was not being reached in the proposed legislation. Drawing from the SNP's strong position following the 2015 General Election, the party was particularly active in criticising early drafts of the Scotland Act. Commenting on an SNP amendment to one of the early drafts, SNP Westminster leader Angus Robertson described the Smith Commission recommendations as 'the bare minimum which should be delivered to Scotland', arguing that the Bill failed 'to meet even the limited powers set out in the Smith Commission' and fell 'far short of the aspirations of people in Scotland as expressed so firmly at the General Election' (Scottish National Party, 2015k). Later, the focus on securing powers beyond the Smith Commission recommendations faded further, with criticism of UK government policy focusing on simply failing to implement the report in full (Scottish National Party, 2015f). By 2016 and the finalisation of the Scotland Act 2016, the SNP rhetoric focused on the importance of securing the powers that were available in the Act, this despite considering that the powers were still insufficient (ITV, 2016; Swinney, 2016). One of the last points of contention in the SNP rhetoric concerned what the SNP perceived as a lack of fiscal framework associated with the new powers included in the Scotland Act, with concerns that the 'no detriment principle'

described above was not being respected and that the powers devolved in the Scotland Act, alongside continued budget cuts from the UK central government, would have a negative impact on the Scottish government's own budget (ITV, 2016; Swinney, 2016).

By 2016 however, the focus of the SNP's institutional grievances had shifted away from matters of 'internal self-determination' towards a renewed push for independence (Brooks, 2016b). As early as September 2015, and despite refusing to consider the 2015 General Election result as a mandate for an independence referendum at the time (The Scotsman, 2015), SNP-elected representatives began arguing that a vote to leave the European Union in the then-upcoming European Union membership referendum in June 2016 was a sufficiently significant event to warrant re-opening the debate on Scottish independence (Barbiere, 2015; Brooks, 2016b). Discussions on introducing a second independence referendum began playing a central part in SNP rhetoric in the run-up to the 2016 Scottish elections and the subsequent European Union membership referendum, both in June 2016. Campaigning for the 2016 Scottish elections was perceived by observers as being dominated by the independence question. Accordingly, a series of televised leaders' debate prior to the 2016 Scottish election were broadly seen as being dominated by debates over the legitimacy of a second independence referendum, although much of the discussion focused on economic arguments for and against independence itself (BBC News, 2016b; Brooks, 2016a). The commitment to independence was re-iterated in the SNP's manifesto for the 2016 elections, in which the SNP committed to organising a referendum 'if there is clear and sustained evidence that independence has become the preferred option of a majority of the Scottish people – or if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will' (Scottish National Party, 2016b).

In the run-up to the EU membership referendum held weeks after the Scottish elections in June 2016, SNP rhetoric focused on defending EU membership, emphasising the economic and political benefits of membership for Scotland. A series of posts detailing the SNP's position on EU membership highlighted membership benefits with regard to young people, families, employment, trade, immigration and international investment (Furby, 2016a, 2016b; Livey, 2016). While the SNP's defence of EU membership itself focused primarily on economic matters, the SNP's response to the referendum result focused primarily on institutional considerations. In a televised statement on the morning following the EU membership

referendum, Sturgeon described a second independence vote as ‘highly likely’ (Cramb and Henderson, 2016). Justifying the mandate for a second independence referendum in an interview conducted for the purpose of this research, SNP Member of the European Parliament Alyn Smith emphasised institutional failings, as well as the result of the EU referendum itself in which a majority of Scottish voters voted to remain in the EU (The Electoral Commission, 2016), as primary reasons legitimising the SNP’s demand for a second independence referendum. Alyn Smith emphasised, for instance, what he perceived as a continued inequality between the Scottish government and the UK government, highlighting the UK government’s unwillingness to negotiate or implement amendments from the Scottish government in the run-up to the EU referendum such as voting age, including EU citizens in the franchise for the referendum or including a ‘double majority’ requirement (majority across the UK and all four constituent nations). More so than the EU referendum result, Smith emphasised primarily what he perceived as an unwillingness or inability from the UK government to work with and consider the Scottish parliament, lamenting the lack of a ‘spirit of compromise’ and describing the UK-Scotland intergovernmental relationship as ‘not a partnership’.

Throughout the first half of 2017, the SNP continued to emphasise their pursuit of independence, with Nicola Sturgeon announcing a second Scottish referendum in March 2017, and further committing to the vote in the run-up to the 2017 General Election (Cheyne, 2017; Stone, 2017). However, disappointing results in that election, in which the SNP lost 21 of its 56 seats, undermined the SNP’s plans to introduce a second independence referendum, leading to its postponement until 2018 at the earliest (Carrell, 2017; Johnson, 2017). While it remains unclear whether an independence referendum in response to the EU referendum will take place, the SNP’s institutional grievances, from 2016 to the current time of writing, have focused primarily on the impact of leaving the European Union for Scotland.

Institutional grievances have, throughout the period analysed in this thesis, continued to be central to the SNP’s policy platform and rhetoric. However, and unlike Corsica and Catalonia, several external events and an ongoing negotiation process with the central UK government have led to changes in emphasis in the SNP’s rhetoric, ranging from the demand for deeper political autonomy and further devolution at the time of the negotiations for the Scotland Act 2016 to a renewed demand for outright independence in the context of the UK’s upcoming departure from the European Union. These changes over time can be explained in different ways. Following the 2014 referendum on independence, many agents, including the SNP, had come to the conclusion that independence was no longer a legitimate goal in the short

term, having been rejected by the Scottish electorate. However, the critical juncture caused by the European Union referendum in 2016 altered this position, creating another self-determination-based normative gap between the SNP and the central UK government. Considering the central place given to the EU referendum result in Scotland in SNP rhetoric, the normative chain legitimising the pursuit of self-determination can be understood in these terms:

- (1) The Scottish people are a distinct people, that should be entitled to democratic self-determination.
- (2) Therefore the democratic decision of the Scottish people to remain a member of the European Union should be respected.
- (3) For this democratic decision to be respected, the Scottish people should be consulted on independence from the United Kingdom, on the assumption that the choice is either (a) remain in the United Kingdom and outside of the European Union or (b) achieve independence and remain a member of the European Union.

Considering the relative overall acceptance of the Scottish people's 'peopleness' described above, at first glance these norms should appear unproblematic. However, a significant normative difference developed in the specific context of the UK referendum on European Union membership. While, for the purpose of Scottish elections or in the context of Scottish independence, Scottish 'peopleness' is well established and recognised by all relevant agents, Scottish 'peopleness' appears subsumed within a broader 'British peopleness' in British government rhetoric about the legitimacy of the EU referendum result. Frequently presented as a decision by 'the British people' (see May, 2017), the absence of a distinction between the 'British people' and its components within the rhetorical context of the EU referendum meant that the right to self-determination, which appeared virtually uncontested in the run up and the aftermath of the 2014 independence referendum, was denied by the UK central government in the context of the European Union referendum. As a response, the SNP hardened its position on self-determination, arguing that only external self-determination would enable the Scottish 'people' to make major decisions such as European Union membership on the basis of the wishes they expressed.

Economic Grievances

Economic grievances, while present in the rhetoric of most political parties, are presented and mobilised by minority nationalist parties in a different way. In the case of Scotland, the central position given to economic policies in the Scottish National Party's political platform cannot be overstated. In the run-up to the 2015 United Kingdom General Election, the first of two major electoral contests observed through my daily collection of social media posts, media appearances, speeches and other forms of party literature, economic grievances, and the SNP's policies to address some of these economic issues, were at the centre of party rhetoric and perception.

Major statements and documents ahead of the election emphasised SNP opposition to Conservative Party economic policy. The introductory section of the party's election manifesto illustrates this:

The SNP will use our influence at Westminster to help deliver positive change for the benefit of ordinary people, not just in Scotland, but across the UK.

We propose a real alternative to the pain of austerity, an end to unfair policies like the Bedroom Tax, a higher minimum wage and protection for our NHS and vital public services.

Instead of even deeper Westminster spending cuts, we want to see more investment in our economy, to create more and better paid jobs.

And we want the precious resources of our country to be invested in building a better future for our children, not on a new generation of nuclear weapons.

The SNP will never put the Tories into power. (Scottish National Party, 2015q)

In this extract from the SNP 2015 manifesto, which represents more than half of the introductory message, opposition to public expenditure cuts and support for greater public spending in public services form the core of the SNP's campaign platform. This economic focus was further reiterated during Nicola Sturgeon's 'campaign conference' speech in March 2015, during which she dedicated a considerable amount of time to attacks against 'slash and burn austerity' and support for 'a fair wage for all', 'pensions that protect our older people' and 'a decent welfare system that helps people into work' (Scottish National Party, 2015h).

A similar emphasis on economic issues continued in the months following the 2015 general election. A post-election *rapprochement* between the SNP and the Scottish Trade Unions Congress (STUC) provided an opportunity for the SNP to continue emphasising its opposition to Conservative Party economic policy and its economic policy proposals (Scottish National Party, 2015j). A series of website posts made throughout the summer of 2015 highlighted a range of economic grievances, from housing shortages (Scottish National Party, 2015c) to the impact of benefit sanctions (Scottish National Party, 2015i, 2015m) to tax credit cuts and their impact on the Scottish population (Scottish National Party, 2015b). Similar posts during the same period highlight how opposition to Conservative Party economic policy was not only at the heart of the SNP's policy platform, but also very much an integral part of the way in which the party sought to portray itself to the public and integral to the place the SNP was seeking to secure in the national political arena – opposition to Conservative Party policy was essential in the SNP's attempt to portray itself as the only 'real opposition' in the United Kingdom Parliament, criticising the Labour Party for its inability to oppose Conservative Party policy effectively (Scottish National Party, 2015l, 2015o). Similar statements on the SNP's official website and in various media outlets continued to emphasise economic policy throughout the autumn of 2015, with for instance then-cabinet secretary for social justice Alex Neil MSP stating that the 'SNP's first priority is to stop tax credit cuts' (Learmonth, 2015; Scottish National Party, 2015n, 2015p).

Economic grievances were not only at the heart of the party's campaign rhetoric, but also at the centre of the perception of the SNP's campaign platform by observers and critics alike. Summaries of the platform made available to the public through several national media emphasised the party's economic platform: the BBC for instance provided a list of 'key pledges' of the SNP, with five out of the six 'key pledges' identified as key economic policies including increases in the minimum wage, protection of pensions and increases in public spending (BBC News, 2015b). Other major press outlets such as *The Telegraph* or *The Guardian* provided in-depth summaries of SNP policies ahead of the campaign, with multiple sections dedicated to the SNP's economic policies on issues such as general public spending or welfare and health expenditures (Brooks, 2015; Johnson, 2015).

The centrality of economic issues similarly extended to critics of the SNP's campaign platform, most notably the Conservative Party. One of the major criticisms focused on the SNP's potential desire to enter a coalition agreement with the Labour Party in order to secure power in the event of another 'hung parliament', a parliament in which no party has secured an

overall majority. Then Prime Minister David Cameron frequently described a potential coalition agreement between the SNP and the Labour Party as a ‘coalition of chaos’, emphasising what he perceived as the economic damage that such a coalition would cause – ‘job losses’, ‘massive tax rises’ and an ‘economy “back on the brink of bankruptcy”’ (BBC News, 2015a; Morris, 2015; Wintour, 2015). While, as I described above, institutional issues also played an important part in the SNP’s rhetoric around the 2015 General Election campaign, it is clear from evidence collected from both SNP publications and media appearances and general media coverage that their economic grievances, as well as the policy platform developed address these issues, dominated both the rhetoric and the perception of the SNP during that campaign.

Throughout my observation of the SNP’s rhetoric daily and at the time of major electoral contests, it is clear that economic grievances play a significant role and shape the policy platform adopted by the party, the image it seeks to establish of its own political role and the perception of its main policies in both the media and from the perspective of opposition parties in the United Kingdom.

Catalonia

In the Catalan case, the relative importance of economic, identity-based and institutional grievances differs from the Scottish case. Identity-based grievances, while important to Catalan nationalism, are inseparable from broader institutional grievances. It is to these two that I turn my attention now.

Identity-based and institutional grievances

There are several reasons to consider both identity-based and institutional grievances as closely connected in the Catalan case. One of the most important considerations, however, relates to the notion of ‘peopleness’, and the extent to which this is contested by the Spanish central government. As we have seen in the case of language in Scotland, a norm around which there is significant consensus across most critical actors will usually become secondary in the discourse of minority nationalist parties. The notion of ‘peopleness’ itself for the Catalans, with all its requirements in terms of cultural, historical and linguistic recognition, is relatively uncontroversial.

Language is an essential component of Catalan nationalism, and an essential component of Catalan national identity (Major, 2013). Of all the cases analysed here, Catalonia is the closest to being a bilingual society. Although some academics characterise Catalan society as being divided along ethnolinguistic lines (Miley, 2013), and, according to 2008 figures, only 35% of the population were native Catalan speakers, 94% of residents over the age of 14 indicated that they could understand Catalan, with 78.3% saying they could speak the language, 81.7% saying they could read it and 61.8% saying they could write it (Xavier Vila, 2013). Proficiency levels increase in the younger age groups, with 2010 data showing that 85% of 15-24 year old residents report that they can understand, speak, write and read Catalan perfectly (Strubell, 2013). The Catalan language, broadly understood as an ‘expression’ of ‘Catalan nature’ and one of the building blocks of the Catalan nation, enjoys broad support among the population and is among the 20 most used languages globally (Major, 2013; Xavier Vila, 2013). Most road signs, commercial signs, place names and street names are often exclusively in Catalan and all newspapers publishing in Catalonia publish either exclusively in Catalan or publish simultaneous, separate Castilian and Catalan editions. Public television in Catalonia is also primarily in Catalan. (Xavier Vila, 2013)

Unlike most of the parties analysed in this thesis, the presence of Catalan nationalists in power for most of the past thirty years at the regional level gives us a clear insight into the importance accorded to language in Catalan minority nationalist party rhetoric and policy. In an interview with Catalan MEP Ramon Tremosa i Balcells, he described Catalan nationalist parties as being particularly focused on language prior to 2010, with a focus on education and the media (Appendix A, interview 8). This focus is reflected in some of the key policies passed by the minority nationalist regional government in the years and decades following the re-establishment of the Catalan regional government in 1979. The *Llei de Normalització Lingüística* in 1983, followed by the *Llei de Política Lingüística* in 1998, contributed significantly to increasing Catalan speaker numbers and Catalan education provision, while building on the recognition afforded by the 1979 Statute of Autonomy to firmly establish Catalan as the primary language of business, administration, education, culture and the media in Catalonia (Mayans Balcells, 2013; Miley, 2013).

The commitment to Catalan as a “normal” language to be used daily for political activity was evident in the fieldwork conducted for this thesis. With regard to social media and

internet identification and communication, all minority nationalist parties in Catalonia overwhelmingly use Catalan for social media messages, press releases and online multimedia. A glance at the website of both the PDeCAT and ERC reveals that neither party provide a Castilian translation of their website and content, a fact that contrasts significantly with the use of minority languages online and on websites in Britain and France. While the commitment to bilingualism, even in the event of an independent Catalonia, remains a feature of minority nationalist rhetoric and thought (El Periódico, 2015), there is no doubt from looking at the online presence of Catalan minority nationalist parties that from their perspective, Catalan is the primary, national language of Catalonia, and the language to be used in public and political life.

Some academics have argued that, although language is a crucial element of Catalan nationalism, the surge of pro-independence feeling as well as the secure status of Catalan as the primary language of Catalan society have made language issues secondary in the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties and in pro-independence campaigns (Xavier Vila, 2013). Indeed, throughout the fieldwork period for this study which included the significant September 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections, language was clearly a secondary issue relative to the economy, healthcare and constitutional issues (Junts Pel Sí, 2015m). In an interview, Ramon Tremosa i Balcells, while recognising the role of language as an essential part of Catalan identity, did not particularly mention language as a key political issue at stake today as opposed to democracy, potential independence and the economy (Appendix A, interview 8). The strong status of the Catalan language, and its frequent use, seem to have depoliticised, or ‘normalised’ the presence and use of Catalan language within Catalan society, a status that is rarely questioned from within Catalonia.

Supported in large part by a flexible institutional framework granting significant autonomy to the Catalan government on language policy, minority nationalist parties in government in Catalonia have been able to implement wide ranging policies that have contributed to the establishment of ‘Catalan is the primary language of Catalonia’ as the primary norm regulating the position and status of the language within Catalonia and Catalan society. The norm, supported by the laws described above and introduced by Catalan minority nationalists in government, continues to be well established within Catalonia, as illustrated by the use of Catalan as a primary language of communication by most Catalan political parties. However, while minority nationalist parties no longer treat language as a primary issue in their day-to-day rhetoric, occasional attacks on the norm stated above have led to re-emergence of

language as a significant topic in Catalan politics. Tensions have re-emerged in the recent context of a surge of pro-independence feeling since 2010. Several decisions made by the central Spanish state can be understood as either limiting attempts at further strengthening the norm, and, in some cases, as attempts to reverse it. In 2010, a reformed Statute of Autonomy was deemed constitutionally invalid by the Spanish Constitutional Court, with specific mention made of a clause making Catalan the sole language of instruction (Mayans Balcells, 2013), the argument being that while Castilian was considered compulsory for all citizens in the Constitution, the same could not be declared of any other language (Xavier Vila, 2013). In this context of tensions, Spanish Education Minister José Ignacio Wert introduced an Organic Law for the Improvement of the Quality of Education in 2012, providing balanced Castilian/Catalan teaching across all subjects, prohibiting the exclusion of Castilian as a language of instruction and giving parents the choice to pick the language of education of their children (Xavier Vila, 2013). In further comments, justifying the law, Wert argued that one of the causes of separatist feeling in Catalonia was decades-long indoctrination in the Catalan education system, arguing for the need to “Hispanise” Catalan pupils (Ganyet, 2013; Mayans Balcells, 2013).

There is however, little sign of the norm being reversed successfully. Despite attempts at restricting the increasingly dominant position of Catalan within Catalonia, the language continues to be the primary language of public life within the territory. Unlike Scotland however, minority nationalist parties have continued to try and strengthen the position of Catalan within Catalonia, and moves by the Spanish state to either limit these attempts or even reverse some of measures granting Catalan a dominant position in education have triggered significant reactions from minority nationalists. However, drawing upon the fact that Catalan use is widespread in society and, for the most part, not significantly contested by any critical political agent, Catalan nationalists have frequently focused on more contentious issues for which persuasion, and further norm diffusion and legitimisation, were necessary.

As we have seen above, the Catalan language enjoys a significant degree of protection within Catalan society, and remains firmly established in day-to-day use. The relative strength of the Catalan language, and the way in which it contributes to the creation of a sense of distinct identity for Catalans, means that in general, recognition is not at stake for Catalan minority nationalist parties, and pure, identity-based grievances tend not to occupy an important place in those parties’ rhetoric and policy platforms.

However, unlike Scotland, difficulties emerge in Catalonia with regard to the normative connection between ‘peopleness’ and self-determination and all its institutional consequences. As in the case of Corsica, the normative contestation between minority nationalists and the Spanish central government focuses on the Constitution, and often takes place outside of the strictly political realm. As an example of this, two major decisions taken by the Spanish Constitutional Court highlight the difficulties minority nationalist parties have faced in reconciling cultural, historical ‘peopleness’ with the rights this potentially confers on a people through self-determination.

One of the most fundamental illustrations of the normative clash between Catalan minority nationalist parties and the Spanish central state is the 2010 rejection of the 2006 reform of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy by the Spanish Constitutional Court. Despite broad political agreement between the then-Catalan government and the Spanish central government, the new statute was brought to the Spanish Constitutional Court, who, following four years of deliberation, rejected it as unconstitutional (de Laguérie, 2014). While the Court highlighted several problems, the detail of the clauses that were considered unconstitutional and the reasoning behind this decision is less relevant, and had less of an impact on Catalan minority nationalism, than the overall perception this decision caused. Referring to the overall decision as opposed to any specific clause, Catalan minority nationalist parties argued that internal self-determination on the terms supported by the Catalan population through elections was no longer possible within the legal framework of the Spanish state (de Laguérie, 2014). Accordingly, while the detail of the decision taken by the Spanish Constitutional Court in 2010 is rarely brought up in public rhetoric, minority nationalist party representatives made it abundantly clear throughout the 2015 electoral campaign that the Court’s decision was one of the key motivations for their decision to pursue independence rather than further autonomy (Esquerra Republicana, 2015e; Romeva i Rueda, 2015c). Observers widely credit the decision as the main factor that transformed the Catalan pro-independence movement from a minority to a quasi-majority today (Munoz Jofre, 2014).

Aside from the symbolic impact of the 2010 Constitutional Court decision, a further decision, published this time in 2014 in response to the Catalan Parliament’s 2013 adoption of a ‘Declaration of Sovereignty’ challenged, more directly, the notion of ‘peopleness’ put forward by minority nationalist parties in Catalonia. The Declaration, among other points, declares the Catalan people as a ‘political and sovereign entity’, ‘backed by democratic legitimacy’ and established a guaranteed legal commitment to facilitating the practice of ‘self-

determination’ in a negotiated process with the Spanish government (Parlament de Catalunya, 2013). In doing so, the Declaration establishes the position of the Catalan people not only as a distinct ‘people’ from the Spanish people, but also as an equal by virtue of its status as a political, sovereign, and democratically legitimate entity. In opposition to this, the decision published by the Spanish Constitutional Court argued that the clauses on sovereignty contained in the Declaration violated two articles of the Spanish Constitution:

Article 1.2: National sovereignty stems from the Spanish people, from whom the powers of the State emanate.

Article 2: The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards; it recognises the right to self-government of the nationalities and regions of which it is composed and the solidarity among them all (Cortes Generales, 2011)

Based on the brief description made of the Declaration above, it is relatively clear that it is incompatible with these two articles. If sovereignty within Spain stems from the Spanish people, another category cannot simultaneously be sovereign. This fact is reinforced by the ‘indissoluble’ and ‘indivisible’ nature of the Spanish nation as established in Article 2. While the second article does recognise the right for ‘nationalities’ to exercise self-government, the fact that these nationalities are deemed to ‘compose’ the ‘Spanish nation’ as opposed to being distinct from it precludes any possibility of considering a sub-section of the Spanish people as a distinct ‘people’ with access to full self-determination. The notion that national sovereignty stems from the Spanish people, also means that although the ‘nationalities’ and ‘regions’ that compose Spain have a right to self-government as established in Article 2, any decision regarding self-government is subject not just to the people of a given region or territory, but to the Spanish people (as the only legitimate sovereign entity) as a whole, an expression of which the Constitution establishes itself to be (Comella, 2014).

The normative struggle surrounding ‘peopleness’ and ‘self-determination’ illustrated by these two major Spanish Constitutional Court decisions highlights the core institutional grievance at the heart of Catalan minority nationalist discourse. Throughout the period analysed, Catalan minority nationalist parties offered one, major reason for their pursuit of external self-determination: the unwillingness of the Spanish central government to recognise the democratic decisions made by the Catalan people (by electing, several times in relatively quick succession, minority nationalist majorities in the Catalan parliament). In a series of public

messages on social media, Raul Romeva, a major minority nationalist political actor and leader of the *Junts Pel Sí* electoral coalition heading into the October 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections, highlighted a number of reasons as to why his coalition were now pursuing independence actively:

We are where we are because we have no alternative. We spent five years demanding a legal and agreed negotiating process, and nothing. On the #27S [27th September, the date of the election], we will finally make them listen.’ (Romeva i Rueda, 2015e)

We are where we are because even though a majority of the Parliament (80%) is in favour of the “Right To Decide”, we nevertheless cannot exercise that right (Romeva i Rueda, 2015b)

We are where we are because a President went to the ballot box, to ask people, and was taken to court in response (Romeva i Rueda, 2015d)

We are where we are because a country voted for a new Statute, and a political Tribunal decided to reject it (Romeva i Rueda, 2015c)

This series of messages encompasses, in brief, the fundamental institutional grievance put forward by minority nationalist parties in Catalonia to legitimise the pursuit of external self-determination. Described as unwilling and ‘tirelessly working against Catalonia’ (Esquerra Republicana, 2015e; Junqueras, 2015b), Catalan minority nationalist parties focused much of their rhetorical anger on the unwillingness of the Spanish state to recognise and act upon Catalan demands for Constitutional reform, an important pre-requisite for further autonomy or for any legal independence referendum (Comella, 2014).

The critique of the Spanish state’s position can be understood from the perspective of norm diffusion. As long as the Spanish state, most notably through the Constitutional Court but subsequently directly via the suspension of Catalonia’s political autonomy in the aftermath of the attempted independence referendum in 2017 (Torregrosa, 2017), continues to rely on coercion as a method of imposing and safeguarding its norms regarding Spanish sovereignty and ‘peopleness’, it becomes very complicated for Catalan minority nationalists to successfully diffuse their norms and reach a stage of norm cascading. Insofar as Catalonia remains a part of Spain, the Spanish central government remains one of the most important ‘critical agents’ for norm diffusion in Catalonia – without the approval, or at the least the tacit indifference, of the

Spanish government, minority nationalist parties will struggle to implement their preferred norms in a legitimate and functional way. The continued request for negotiations can be understood as an attempt to move away from coercion towards a process of socialization, where both parties, through exchange and mutual learning, can either be persuaded to adopt each other's norms or adopt a compromise norm that satisfies all of the necessary critical agents. At the time of writing however, there is very little evidence of such a demand being met.

Economic grievances

In addition to these fundamental institutional grievances, Catalan minority nationalist parties also draw on the economy as an important area of political discourse. While central in the case of the SNP, economic discourse here plays a secondary role in relation to the institutional grievances addressed above. In most cases, economic grievances are consequences of the institutional grievances, and are used as evidence to support the perceived necessity of independence. More often than not, Catalan minority nationalist discourse on the economy does not take the form of grievances, but of opportunities: public discourse has a tendency in this case to focus on the 'opportunities' of independence, as opposed to the economic 'problems' caused by continued incorporation into the wider Spanish state.

Both grievances and opportunities form the basis of the electoral manifesto put forward by the *Junts Pel Sí* coalition in 2015. One of the most significant economic grievances put forward concerns the fiscal arrangements and the fiscal contribution of Catalonia to the overall Spanish economy and government. In the manifesto, *Junts Pel Sí* argue that Catalonia contributes 19.8% of the overall Spanish budget, while receiving 14% back in public expenditure from the central government (Junts Pel Sí, 2015k). According to the manifesto, recovering the money lost in this fiscal deficit would allow for further investment in social security, education and healthcare, and would simultaneously allow Catalonia to adopt a simpler, more advantageous tax structure for individuals and businesses (Junts Pel Sí, 2015k).

Another important question that is often raised by minority nationalists in Catalonia is what they believe to be a 'historic deficit in infrastructure investment' that Catalonia suffers from as a result of Spanish government policy and centralisation. Minority nationalist political actors frequently criticised the lack of central government investment in a wide range of infrastructures, such as trains, airports, ports and roads (El Punt Avui, 2016; March, 2016). Ramon Tremosa i Balcells (Appendix A, interview 8), Catalan Member of the European

Parliament for the PdeCAT party, also highlighted the lack of central government investment in basic infrastructures, accusing Spain's 'centralisation' as one of the major reasons why major infrastructure projects were frequently focused around Madrid, as opposed to Barcelona. He also contrasted the lack of central government investment with the overall economic dynamism of the Catalan economy, a contrast which, if widely acknowledged, significantly contributes to reinforcing the perception that the Spanish central government is hindering, rather than helping, Catalonia as a whole. Much of the economic discourse of minority nationalist parties hinges exactly on these two facets: criticising the Spanish government for its ineffective economic management, and promoting the idea that an independent Catalonia would inherently achieve better results. This, in turn, highlights the extent to which the economic grievances of Catalan minority nationalist parties play a primarily supportive role to fundamental institutional demands.

Corsica

The political and historical context of our final case, Corsica, also contrasts with that found in Scotland and Catalonia. Accordingly, although all three major types of grievances are found in the discourse of minority nationalists in Corsica, the emphasis placed on identity-based grievances differs markedly from what we described in Scotland and Catalonia.

Identity-based grievances

As discussed above in the context of 'peopleness', Corsica remains the only territory, out of the three discussed here, to not have its population recognised as distinct from the overall population of the State. In this context, where securing 'peopleness' remains the primary struggle faced by minority nationalist parties, identity-based grievances are the most salient issues in Corsican nationalist political rhetoric.

While in Catalonia and Scotland the vocabulary of injustice is often used to describe the way in which central government addresses minority nationalist demands, Corsica is the only example here where the notion of injustice is reinforced by the notion of 'survival'. The idea that the Corsican people, their culture, their language, are in mortal danger and risk disappearing, frequently appears in Corsican nationalist rhetoric. Gilles Simeoni, when addressing the debate around the 'peopleness' of Corsicans following his success at the 2015

regional elections, argued that ‘when a Constitution does not allow the recognition of a people, we need to change the Constitution, not make that people disappear’ (20 minutes, 2017). Similarly, in an interview for this thesis, Jean-Guy Talamoni described the Corsican people as an ‘endangered people’, arguing that because of France’s refusal to recognise and properly support the Corsican language and their refusal to recognise Corsicans as a distinct ‘people’, Corsicans had been, for a very long time, condemned to disappear and assimilate into the wider French population.

For minority nationalist parties in Corsica, language remains one of the most central and essential political issues within their rhetoric and action. Language plays an important, symbolic role in the ideology of Corsican nationalism, as best described here by Pierre Poggioli, veteran radical nationalist and academic:

Corsicans have a language, both a natural communicative tool and the symbol of a collective identity. Our language is not simply an external or internal vector for communication. Language constitutes our identity, on the same terms as culture, and it is both the foundation and the expression of a people’s identity, and the main thing preventing the assimilation and disappearance of our people. (Poggioli, 2016, p. 35)

Further on, Poggioli describes Corsican nationalism’s struggle for linguistic recognition as a struggle for ‘who they are’, arguing that the language is the main reason through which ‘Corsicans constitute a people in the first place’ (Poggioli, 2016, p. 36). This idea of language as primordial vector of identity is echoed across Corsican nationalism: in an interview conducted for this study, Jean-Guy Talamoni described language as “not a single issue, but permeating all issues. Language is what we are” (Appendix A, Interview 3). Such an understanding of language is not reserved to the radical branch of Corsican nationalism (see the thesis introduction for an explanation of different branches of Corsican nationalism). Gilles Simeoni, current executive leader of the Corsican sub-national authority and moderate nationalist leader, describes language as one of the pillars that establishes Corsicans as distinct people, alongside geography and a shared identity (Appendix A, interview 2).

The strength of Corsican nationalism’s commitment to the Corsican language, as well as the centrality of language within the agenda of Corsican nationalist parties, stems from Corsica’s unique situation within France with respect to its ‘regional’ language. While many, if not all regional languages in France have been reduced to a marginal position, characterised

by absence from society and falling speaker numbers, Corsica has been characterised as being in a situation of ‘diglossia’, a term used to characterise situations in which two language subsist in different spheres within society, with different usages (Cole and Harguindéguy, 2013). Estimates for the number of Corsican speakers vary greatly, depending on whether the Corsican diaspora (estimated at over 500.000 people in mainland France) is included in the statistics or not. Figures vary from 90.000 to 150.000 Corsican speakers, at varying levels of competency (Verdoodt, 1991; Cole and Harguindéguy, 2013). Recent estimates state 90.000 (45% of the island’s population) regular Corsican speakers, although Corsican civil society organisation Parlemu Corsu (‘Let’s Speak Corsican’) moderate these figures by arguing that 50.000 daily Corsican speakers would be a more realistic target, indicating that daily speakers represent a smaller number than this figure.

While Corsican, as a minority language, remains remarkably strong in comparison to its regional counterparts in other territories within France, the institutional and normative framework surrounding minority language status and use has contributed very little to the safeguarding and promotion of Corsican in Corsica. Unlike in the cases of Scotland and Catalonia, and as we saw above, language policy in France remains explicitly set at the national level, with several norms such as ‘French is the language of the Republic’ establishing French as the dominant, and only legitimate, language in the public sphere. Unlike Scotland and Catalonia, Corsican minority nationalist parties have had very little impact in establishing the institutional and normative framework regulating minority language status and use within Corsica. Of the three cases, Corsica is undoubtedly the case where minority language use remains the most contentious.

Although measures at the French state level on the teaching of minority languages have contributed in some way to the protection of Corsican, much of the current status enjoyed by Corsican in Corsica stems from a broad cultural ‘revival’ movement in which minority nationalist parties played a part alongside cultural groups, artists, and musicians. The movement, called ‘U Riacquistu’ (The Reappropriation) by Corsican nationalists, marked a period of intense cultural revival with a plethora of Corsican language literature works, music groups and other artists re-establishing a strong and vibrant cultural basis upon which a renewal of Corsican identity in the following decades was based (Poggioli, 2016). The movement, which according to Jean-Guy Talamoni re-established the Corsican language as a desirable and valuable entity as opposed to a sign of backwardness (Appendix A, interview 3), contributed

significantly to the revival of the Corsican language's fortunes in a process which mirrored the re-emergence of Corsican nationalism as a viable political force.

In addition to the cultural movement described above however, minority nationalist parties have, since entering government at the Corsican level in 2015, engaged in a number of policies and activities in an attempt to further reinforce the status of the Corsican language in Corsica. These measures, which include education funding and a simultaneous pursuit of official recognition paired with an increasing use of Corsican as a de facto official language, constitute the main ways in which Corsican minority nationalists have attempted to undermine strict linguistic norms at the French state level by pushing into existence alternative norms corresponding closer to their own normative stances.

The first, and perhaps the most important attempt at improving Corsican's position in Corsica, is Corsican nationalist support for increased Corsican-language education on the island. Although the political and legal space for Corsican-language education is limited in the French context as we have seen above, Corsican nationalists supported a language plan called *Lingua 2020*, aiming to generalise bilingualism on the island and generalise a minimum of three weekly Corsican language hours in all schools on the island (Collectivité Territoriale de Corse, 2017). This plan, although less extensive than what has been implemented in other territories such as Scotland and Catalonia (as we saw above), seeks to increase Corsican language proficiency with the aim of establishing a bilingual society in which Corsican operates as an equal language to the current, majority French language.

Another policy promoted by Corsican nationalists is the idea of language co-officiality. (France 3 Corse Via Stella, 2013). This policy, if implemented, would recognise the Corsican language as an official language alongside French within the Corsican public sphere. In practice, this would allow all elected representatives to use Corsican within the Corsican Assembly, while allowing individuals in Corsica to interact with administrative bodies in either Corsican or French, following their preference. In addition to making Corsican considerably more relevant to daily, public life, such a move would significantly increase the public visibility of Corsican. However, bearing in mind Article 2 of the French Constitution ('The Language of the Republic is French'), government approval for such a move appears unlikely. Former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls rejected calls for the official status of Corsican in 2013 (AFP, 2013), and future developments in favour of this measure seem unlikely at the time of writing. This, in practice, means that a norm according to which 'Corsican should be an official

language in Corsica’ is unlikely to override the norm codified in Article 2 of the French Constitution, and attempts at enforcing the use of French as the exclusive language of public life in Corsica enjoy, at the very least, a significant degree of legal legitimacy.

As an alternative to the granting of an official status to Corsican, Corsican nationalists have attempted to circumvent central government opposition to the policy by implementing a de facto official status for the Corsican language. The most high-profile examples of this are the speeches conducted in Corsican in the Corsican Assembly by Jean-Guy Talamoni and Gilles Simeoni upon their election as President of the Corsican Assembly and President of the Corsican Executive respectively (Quinault Maupoil, 2015). The idea of a de facto official status for Corsican was also explicitly stated by Gilles Simeoni in an interview conducted during my fieldwork:

Today, you are aware that we are putting forward a demand for a co-official status between Corsican and French. Today, it is not possible in the current legal framework. We have a proactive policy which attempts to establish co-officiality in practice, even though it is not legally established yet. (Appendix A, interview 2).

While speeches in the Corsican Assembly were high profile moves, this de facto co-official status is visible in a variety of more or less significant domains. Official social media posts are frequently written in Corsican, Government communication includes letterheads and signatures detailing titles and government positions in Corsican, and even the use of Corsican in the visual identity of Corsican government institutions. While lacking in legal legitimacy, Corsican nationalists have been able to establish a situation in which the norm ‘Corsican should be an official language of Corsica’ is perceived as broadly legitimate by a significant portion of the Corsican electorate and political class, a legitimacy further backed by democratic legitimacy obtained through the electoral successes of 2015. This norm, and the legitimacy it has gathered over time, allows for a considerable amount of leeway in the pursuit of de facto co-officiality between Corsican and French, shaping the linguistic reality of both society and public life in Corsica. However, while a sufficient number of critical agents have adopted the alternative norm at the territorial level for the norm to start cascading, any attempts to provide a legal footing to the current de facto status of Corsican within Corsica would undoubtedly require the support, tacit or explicit, of the French government, an important critical agent for any norm to diffuse successfully at the state level. Considering the relative size of Corsica and the lack of any clear support for the alternative norm outside of Corsica, there appears to be little incentive

for this norm to diffuse at the state level, and while the pursuit of de facto co-officiality could trigger a critical juncture in the event of a coercive imposition of the established state-level norm (French as the language of the Republic), the outcome of such a critical juncture is uncertain and the appetite for such a coercive imposition appears limited.

In addition to the issue of language and ‘peopleness’, there are several ways in which identity-based grievances inform and motivate other types of grievances, including economic and institutional ones. It is to these that I now turn.

Economic and institutional grievances

While identity-based grievances form the basis of Corsican nationalism’s policy platform, there are also several economic grievances worth describing here. Most of the economic grievances that appear in Corsican nationalist discourse concern, in one way or another, the question of real-estate and property on the island. Corsican nationalists have, for decades, been extremely critical of what they perceive as the French government’s economic strategy for the island, emphasising tourism above all other forms of economic activity. The emphasis on tourism has, according to Corsican nationalists, widespread damaging effects on the economic situation of the island’s population: according to Femu a Corsica (the major, pro-autonomy Corsican nationalist party), the emphasis on summer tourism creates a situation where employment on the island is unstable, temporary and unemployment in winter becomes a significant problem year on year (Femu a Corsica, 2015; Femu A Corsica, 2015). In addition to this, Corsican nationalists consider that the emphasis on tourism is also responsible for major difficulties Corsicans face to buy property in Corsica. With Corsica being a highly desirable holiday destination, property prices have been driven up by the purchase of properties as holiday homes (Femu A Corsica, 2015), which represent over 30% of the island’s total property according to Corsican nationalists (Femu A Corsica, 2015).

In addition to this critique of Corsica’s current economy, Corsican nationalists also critique the lack of resources given to Corsican authorities to address economic concerns through local-level policy-making. One of the major demands put forward by minority nationalists in the aftermath of the 2015 election is a significant increase in the fiscal powers given to the local Corsican authorities in order not only to establish local taxes on, for instance, holiday properties, but also to gain access to some of the resources that currently contribute to the French government’s budget (Corse Net Infos, 2014; Femu A Corsica, 2015; FranceInfo,

2017). This again, focuses on what Jean-Guy Talamoni described as the need to provide more balanced, sustainable economic development for the island.

The demand for further fiscal powers is particularly interesting: while it is undoubtedly an economic measure, the demand itself highlights the importance of institutional demands in addressing many of the other grievances brought forward by minority nationalists. Overall, in the case of Corsica, institutional grievances cannot be separated from identity-based or economic grievances: whereas institutional demands are well articulated in both Catalonia and Scotland, Corsican nationalists have adopted in recent years a more pragmatic approach to institutional reform, focusing on demands for a ‘negotiation’ with the French government to allow the Corsican executive to implement the decisions it seeks to implement (Collectivité Territoriale de Corse, 2015; Corse Matin, 2015; U Ribombu Internaziunale, 2015; 20 minutes, 2017). While, undoubtedly, the institutional changes required to make the implementation of Corsican nationalist proposals legally possible are indeed significant and involve at least some degree of constitutional reform, institutional grievances in and of themselves do not occupy a major place in the rhetoric and actions of minority nationalists in Corsica.

There are several plausible reasons for this. Agents will act rationally (based on the information they have) to achieve their goals. It is quite possible that, acting rationally in the hope of securing the policy advances minority nationalists seek in Corsica, Corsican nationalists have a belief that it is more likely for the French central government to engage in a negotiated process if the subject of the process is small, targeted, policy-driven demands, as opposed to outright demands for institutional change.

Another likely explanation resides in the unique situation Corsican nationalism finds itself in today. Traditionally divided between radical and moderate branches (Olivesi, 1998), Corsican nationalists have, ahead of the second round of the 2015 elections, agreed to stand together as part of a coalition (Corsica Infurmazione, 2015a), which was then renewed at every subsequent election. As explained by Jean-Guy Talamoni in the interview I conducted, the process to secure the coalition between the two branches of Corsican nationalism was fraught with difficulty, and concessions were made on both sides to reach an agreement on a common electoral manifesto, broadly termed ‘*prugettu cumunu*’ (common project), as described in the introduction to this thesis (Corse Matin, 2015). Perhaps the most important concession in this case is the one made by Jean-Guy Talamoni and the radical branch of Corsican nationalism embodied by *Corsica Libera*: the commitment to not pursue independence for five years. Jean-

Guy Talamoni argued, rather than a definitive end to the pursuit of independence, this allows Corsica and his coalition government with Gilles Simeoni to focus on building the required tools for Corsica to be a sustainable independent country which can be understood as implementing economic, social, linguistic and cultural policies to develop the Corsican economy and Corsican ‘peopleness’ further. It is difficult to make a prediction ahead of time, but it is possible that institutional grievances will reappear as a major point of (radical) Corsican nationalist rhetoric once the agreement to delay the pursuit of independence for five years expires in 2020.

Common normative challenges, common solutions, common difficulties: self-determination, and the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties.

While the minority nationalist parties in Catalonia, Scotland and Corsica share similar grievances on economic, institutional and to some extent identity-based issues, these kinds of grievances *per se* are not exclusive to minority nationalist parties. Economic grievances can be found across most, if not all political parties’ policy platforms, and a significant number of non-nationalist parties also focus on institutional grievances, from the less radical desires to reform public institutions (such as the Liberal Democrats’ desire to reform the House of Lords) to radical attempts to reform, or even replace, codified constitutions (as in the case of *La France Insoumise* or *Podemos* in France and Spain respectively) (La France Insoumise, 2017; Podemos, 2017; The Liberal Democrats, 2017).

However, there are other common points which are specific to minority nationalist parties and allow us to distinguish their grievances from those of other political parties in Europe. Minority nationalist parties emphasise self-determination as one of the driving factors (and a major solution) to many of the grievances they put forward, emphasising ‘peopleness’ in their rhetoric. Minority nationalist parties across Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland share, with the exception of one party in Corsica, a common solution to many of the grievances they put forward: external self-determination.

Despite the general dissatisfaction with internal self-determination as practised in their respective countries, the extent to which external self-determination is pursued by minority nationalists depends in large part on the political context within which such demands are promoted. As seen in the case of the SNP, the focus of the party’s rhetoric and action fluctuated between pushes for external self-determination (as in the period around the EU referendum)

and pushes for additional internal self-determination. The focus of the SNP on additional powers for the Scottish government and parliament in the aftermath of the 2014 independence referendum can be attributed to a number of reasons: firstly, the independence debate was broadly perceived as having been settled, at the very least in the short term, by the rejection of independence in that referendum. Secondly, the willingness of the UK government to consider additional devolved powers, notably through the appointment of the Smith Commission and the drafting of the Scotland Act 2016, provided a platform upon which the SNP could address some of the perceived shortcomings in the internal self-determination arrangements in the United Kingdom, by negotiating and pushing for additional powers that increased the extent of self-government being conducted by the Scottish authorities, providing more tools for the governing SNP to implement other policy objectives and address other grievances on welfare or the economy. In comparison, similar minority nationalist grievances regarding the state of internal self-determination in Catalonia and Corsica were met with considerably less input from their central governments. In the case of Spain, the surge in Catalan nationalism is frequently seen as being caused by the continued refusal of the Spanish state to negotiate and implement new and broader autonomous powers for the Catalan authorities (Guibernau, 2013; de Laguérie, 2014). The refusal of the Spanish government to change or propose amendments to the internal self-determination arrangements granted to Spanish regions and Catalonia more specifically also led to a shift in policy by the CDC minority nationalist party, a party traditionally supportive of internal self-determination which had, by the time of this study, shifted its position in favour of independence (Junts Pel Sí, 2015j). In Corsica, while the moderate branch of the nationalist movement continues to support further internal self-determination, growing frustrations with the perceived lack of progress in discussions with the French government over key elements of the nationalist policy platform (such as language recognition, fiscal devolution and limits on residential purchases) can, potentially, have the same impact as similar frustrations had on the stance of the CDC in Catalonia. This was hinted at by Jean-Guy Talamoni, representative of the radical branch of Corsican nationalism, in an interview conducted for this study (Appendix A, interview 3)

Despite the differences in context and practice highlighted above however, all three cases can be understood as being at varying stages of the same process. To uncover this, I describe what I have termed a ‘normative chain’, or a set of interrelated norms that, in this case, need to be widely adopted by different critical agents to render minority nationalist demands

fully legitimate. The relevant normative chain, as well as the various critical agents relevant at each stage, are described in Table 1 below.

Table 2: the normative chain followed by minority nationalist parties in Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland (where X represents each territory and its people).

Stage	Norm	Critical Agents
1	X should be recognised as a distinct people.	Local electorate, central government.
2	X, as a distinct people, should be allowed to exercise self-determination.	Local electorate, central government, state-wide electorate (indirectly).
3	X, as a distinct and self-determined people, should be considered as an equal partner in state-level policy discussions.	Local electorate, central government, state-wide electorate (indirectly).
4	The government representing X should have the fullest possible autonomy, or independence, to decide autonomously on as wide a range of policy options as desired by X.	Central government, state-wide electorate (indirectly).
5	Country X, when independent, should be fully recognised internationally as a legitimate, new member of the international community and relevant international organisations.	Central government, other independent states, international organisations.

As is clear, all five norms (or stages) are closely interrelated and, in some cases, can even be understood as extensions, or detailed versions, of each other. However, as we have seen above, the normative challenge put forward by minority nationalist parties in each respective territory currently occurs at different stages, with accession to the next stage depending primarily on the widespread acceptance of the previous norm.

As an example, Corsican nationalists today, with their ongoing struggle for recognised ‘peopleness’, are currently campaigning for the acceptance of the first norm in the table. This explains not only the predominance of identity-based grievances and discourse, but as we will see in the following chapter the focus of Corsican nationalists on the domestic, and even the sub-national, political arena.

In contrast, Catalan minority nationalists can be understood to be engaged in a normative struggle somewhere between ‘stage 2’ and ‘stage 3’, where a degree of self-determination is accepted but continues to exist in a sometimes coercively hierarchical political environment. Finally, the SNP, having secure peopleness, as well as an equal status in many respects with the UK government regarding political discussions on (excluding recent developments on the United Kingdom’s departure from the European Union), could be understood to be engaged simultaneously in a normative challenge at stages 4 and 5, seeking to continuously increase its autonomous power (as an alternative to independence) while arguing that, in the event of independence, Scotland could legitimately become a fully recognised member of the international community. Since the EU Referendum however, with the overall acceptance of the norms at stage 3 and, to an extent, stage 2 by all critical actors coming under scrutiny, the pursuit of independence was resumed and the emphasis of the SNP’s discourse shifted away from economic criticism of the UK central government towards institutional critiques of the perceived inadequate role given to the SNP in determining the nature of the UK’s post-EU relationship.

It is important however, to highlight a number of points that emerge from this analysis. While self-determination plays a central role in minority nationalist party policy and rhetoric, and in many cases these parties have been engaged in decade-long processes of gradual norm diffusion and challenging, the pursuit of self-determination is not an ‘infinite’ process requiring ever more self-determination and culminating in external self-determination. The case of the SNP’s approach to language policy, albeit a marginal issue in Scotland, highlights this well. Minority nationalist parties, in pursuing self-determination, desire the ability to implement what they perceive as best practice normative policies based on their own normative standpoint. While the inability to self-determine will often increase the salience of related grievances in minority nationalist discourse, issues similarly become less important to minority nationalist policy platforms when the degree of self-determination made available to their territory matches that of their own normative expectations. While the SNP has been able to significantly change the position of Gaelic in public life over recent years, it has done so with little to no desire to alter the normative framework established by the 2005 Gaelic Language Act. Comparatively to issues in which the access to self-determination remains unsatisfactory, language issues in the SNP’s rhetoric are undoubtedly secondary. While norms surrounding the place of language in a society are distinct from norms regulating self-determination strictly

speaking, the case of language policy in Scotland shows that, when there is little to no normative conflict over an issue, that issue tends to fade from public rhetoric.

Another important point is that, although there are a variety of critical agents at all stages of the norm chain described above, one of the most recurring and powerful critical agents remains the central government of the state within which minority nationalist parties operate. The example of language provides a first, strong example of this. The central government, in all three cases, remains the most important critical agent when considering whether attempted norm diffusion by minority nationalist parties will lead to norm cascading and wide-ranging institutional changes. In both Scotland and Catalonia, minority nationalist parties have been able to build upon an institutionalised normative consensus over the value of minority languages to push for further changes which have often enjoyed democratic and legal legitimacy. In Scotland, self-determination on the matter of language is broadly granted to devolved institutions, while in Catalonia the establishment of autonomous institutions coupled with the recognition of Catalan as an official language in Catalonia provided a strong institutional and normative baseline upon which minority nationalist party norms policies grew and were established legitimately. In the absence of any normative consensus between minority nationalists and the central government however, normative challenges brought about by those parties are often difficult, uncertain and limited in their reach relative to what parties in Catalonia and Scotland have been able to implement through established, legal institutions.

Similarly, on institutional questions and on matters relating to the recognition of self-determination as a valid right with all that this implies politically, the central government has a significant role to play as an enabler, or a blocker, of normative and institutional change. As we will explore in further detail in the following chapter, the willingness of the United Kingdom central government to legitimise Scottish identity as a politically relevant category (most notably through devolution), and the willingness of the UK government to recognise the Scottish devolved authorities as an equal partner in negotiations on matters of self-determination, has contributed significantly to the broad acceptance and normative internalization of stages 1, 2, 3 and the broad acceptance of stage 4, subject to democratic approval expressed in a referendum. In contrast, government opposition in Catalonia to the recognition of the norm at stage 4 in the table above represents a significant stumbling block, and the overall rejection of the norms regarding peopleness (stage 1) in Corsica represent an even bigger obstacle to minority nationalist party action.

In all cases however, we see how normative challenges are the basis of minority nationalist party activity, and how, depending on which norm is being challenged, minority nationalist parties will adjust their demands and discourse to reflect the reality that their demands, far from being isolated from one another, often rely on a ‘normative chain’, where each step or each norm legitimises the next one, until all the required norms have been accepted to legitimise the overall political goals of these parties.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by highlighting the various ways in which academic literature has extended the concept of self-determination, by adding additional concepts to differentiate different types of self-determination and different elements important to self-determination as a concept. By highlighting ‘peopleness’ as well as a dichotomy between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ self-determination, we give ourselves the tools to understand both the grievances and the solutions espoused by minority nationalist parties.

In the second part of the chapter, I highlighted three different forms of grievances displayed by most minority nationalist parties: economic grievances, focused on what is perceived as underdevelopment or poor living standards in the region these parties claim to represent; institutional grievances, focused on dissatisfaction surrounding existing devolved powers or institutional arrangements; and identity-based grievances, based on a feeling that a distinctive ‘peopleness’ is at best not sufficiently recognised, at worst actively repressed by the central government. The analysis showed that, depending on the extent to which ‘peopleness’ was recognised, and, depending on the extent to which minority nationalist parties clash with other actors in the same political arena, different grievances were emphasised in all three cases, with each case emphasising a particular kind of grievance depending on the degree of normative consensus between themselves and other critical agents within the same environment.

Finally, in the last part of the chapter, I highlighted that, despite these differences, self-determination can be still be understood as the driving principle behind minority nationalist grievances, be they identity-based, economic or institutional. By developing the notion of a ‘normative chain’, bringing together several interrelated norms into one, coherent whole which legitimises the aspirations of minority nationalist parties, I described how, although parties in

the three cases broadly aspire to the same goals, different levels of norm acceptance lead to a different discursive and policy emphasis.

Throughout the chapter, I have demonstrated the central place self-determination occupies in the political rhetoric and activities of minority nationalist parties. Whether it is access to self-determination or its implementation, minority nationalist parties across all three of my cases place the ‘people’, their recognition and their political and economic development at the heart of their rhetoric and policy platform. Identity grievances emerge as the most important kind of grievance when the ‘peopleness’ of a given population is politically claimed by minority nationalist parties, yet rejected by the central state. In cases where ‘peopleness’ is granted and recognised in political discourse, institutional grievances often emerge as minority nationalist parties seek to challenge existing constitutional frameworks to enable the expression of self-determination. Finally, when ‘peopleness’ is recognised both rhetorically and institutionally, minority nationalist parties continue to use the language of ‘peopleness’ and self-determination to justify a wide range of economic grievances, many of which focus on perceived hindrances placed by the central government’s economic policy on the economic development of the ‘people’ they claim to represent. At a fundamental level, all of the grievances are based on self-determination, and lead to normative challenges based on self-determination and its pre-requisites.

Although the theoretical framework used here does lead to some significant differences in terminology, the findings in this chapter provide additional confirmation to many of the findings already established in literature on minority nationalist party analysis, and provides also some subtle differences. The idea that minority nationalist parties are underpinned by self-determination is common in the existing literature (Keating, 2004; Guibernau, 2006; Hepburn, 2008; Hoffbauer, 2011; Gillespie, 2015; Elias and Mees, 2017), and this chapter provides a clear and theoretically supported explanation as to how that is the case in practice. However, while self-determination is seen as one of the factors limiting the spectrum of possible policies a minority nationalist party can adopt, approaching this from a norm and norm diffusion perspective enables us to argue that far from being a single factor, self-determination is perhaps the most important, and most powerful factor legitimising minority nationalist party policies on a very wide range of issues. In many ways, this echoes theories in the literature which argue that minority nationalist parties operate on a multi-dimensional scale, with territorial (self-determination) politics co-existing with traditional economic left-right policies. In giving self-determination such a central position, this theory provides additional

confirmation to the finding by Massetti and Shackel (2015) that minority nationalist parties link traditional left-right politics to territorial politics and subsume them.

While norms ‘underpin’ much of the policy platform adopted by minority nationalist parties, this does not contradict existing literature on minority nationalist party goals. This thesis shows, as per the literature, that minority nationalist parties will adopt, frame, promote and blur issues depending on how they decide to pursue their goals. Rather than invalidate the literature, this thesis provides an additional lens through which to understand how such different policy expressions can all stem from the same, normative bedrock.

While the discourse used by minority nationalist parties with regard to their grievances and ‘peopleness’ does, in some cases, already provide a challenge to fundamental norms of citizenship and territorial integrity within their respective countries, the most fundamental challenge to international and domestic norms occurs in the attempted implementation of external self-determination by minority nationalist parties. However, the inclusion of the dichotomy between external self-determination and internal self-determination allows to conceptualise that although the policies pursued by any given party can be very different at all times, this does not inherently mean that the norms underpinning those different policy positions are different: in short, there are many ways to pursue self-determination for a minority nationalist party.

Drawing on the reliance of minority nationalist parties on democracy as a legitimising element, the next chapter will focus on how minority nationalist parties attempt to implement self-determination, the extent to which this undermines fundamental norms domestically and, perhaps, internationally, and finally the extent to which the critical junctures and norm changes attempted by these parties impact only domestic politics, or whether the normative impact is broader.

4. Minority nationalist parties, self-determination and democracy

In the previous chapter, I analysed the several different types of grievances that underpin the political rhetoric of minority nationalist parties in Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland. While the economic, institutional and identity-based grievances I identified are by no means unique to minority nationalist parties, the conceptual framework within which these parties interpret these grievances and the solutions they put forward are rooted in two key notions at the heart of ‘self-determination’ as a concept – peopleness, and, to a lesser extent, territory.

Understanding the nature of the grievances put forward by minority nationalist parties however does not, in itself, explain the ways in which minority nationalist parties attempt to implement the solutions they promote. In this chapter, I will focus on several related questions, highlighting first the issue of legitimacy, or how exactly minority nationalist parties attempt to legitimise their demands in the eyes of other, influential political actors within relevant political circles: the electorate within their domestic sphere, their national government, and indeed more broadly the international community in the shape of influential global leaders or activists. To understand this, I will draw on the extensive academic discussion surrounding the legitimacy of secession as an expression of national self-determination, drawing upon different theories and analysing to what extent these are expressed in the actions and rhetoric of minority nationalist parties.

As described throughout the thesis, the desire for significant political autonomy or, more frequently in the cases analysed here, political independence, is a highly contested political aim, colliding with sometimes significant political opposition and, in the case of France and Spain, constitutional norms that are broadly perceived as highly legitimate by political actors, the electorate and the international community alike. Drawing on social constructivist notions of rules and norm diffusion, as well as on historical institutionalist notions of ‘critical junctures’, I will analyse how minority nationalist parties attempt to undermine these highly stable norms and, through their rhetoric and actions, attempt to challenge the boundaries of legitimacy within the domestic, and the international political arenas.

I will argue, in this chapter, that notions of ‘democracy’, and its practical implementation through domestic electoral procedures, play a central role in minority nationalist party attempts to challenge the institutional and political order of the states in which they currently operate. By emphasising the ‘democratic’ nature of their action, minority nationalist parties attempt to draw upon the widespread political legitimacy afforded by ‘democracy’ as a principle to create ‘critical junctures’, or key moments in which an alternative norm openly challenges existing, established norms and rules and leads to a process of questioning as to where the boundaries of political legitimacy reside. Accordingly, electoral politics has played an essential role in the actions of minority nationalist parties (a new approach in a section of Corsican nationalism, less so in other cases), and all of the major challenges to state unity brought about by minority nationalist parties recently have stemmed from self-determination, supported by the notion of democratic legitimacy.

Self-determination as an evolving normative and international norm

Early understandings of self-determination: nationalism and Woodrow Wilson

The legitimacy of self-determination as a political principle has shifted numerous times since it emerged, inextricably linked to the simultaneous emergence of nationalism as a political force in the 19th century (Buchanan, 2003). Analysing both these historical developments and the various ways in which normative theorists have attempted to define and construct a legitimate conception of self-determination is essential to understand how the concept frames the rhetoric and policies of minority nationalist parties.

Crucial to understanding the history of self-determination as a political principle is the dichotomy highlighted in the previous chapter, between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ self-determination, describing a measure of self-government within the framework of a state for the former and full, political independence in the latter case. While early understandings of self-determination, as we shall see below, remain unclear as to whether internal or external self-determination is perceived as legitimate, later developments gradually contributed to a narrowing of the legitimacy of external self-determination, first specifically to colonized populations, then later to populations in very specific political contexts – populations suffering from excessive and gross human rights abuses. For populations outside of these cases, ‘internal’ self-determination was perceived as the legitimate option.

Self-determination as a concept is closely tied to the emergence of nationalism as a major ideology of political and social organisation (Buchanan, 2003). Nationalist theories of self-determination are perhaps the oldest, and most sweeping conceptions of self-determination, building upon 19th century nationalist political theory and establishing self-determination as a universal right for national groups. These are broadly understood to rest on the notion that political and cultural boundaries ought to coincide – making the nation-state the preferred form of political organisation (Moore, 1998a). These theories also argue that there is fundamental, universal right for any national group or people to govern themselves, going as far as creating a state in which they can operate as the majority. Pushed to their limits, these theories create a universal right for a national group to secede from any state to either form an independent state or join another state (Norman, 1998).

While an older concept, discussions of self-determination as a relevant principle in international politics did not emerge until the First World War and its aftermath, when international leaders, and most notably United States President Woodrow Wilson, introduced and promoted the notion of self-determination as applying to all mobilized ‘national groups’ (Moore, 1998a; Sterio, 2013). This understanding of self-determination is best described by Wilson himself, in a 1918 address to Congress:

National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent. “Self-determination” is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of actions which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril (Wilson, 1918)

This conception, which emerged as a reaction to the collapse of multi-national and multi-ethnic empires in central Europe following the First World War, provides a strikingly wide basis for legitimate self-determination, seen by Wilson as one of the guarantees of peace in Europe. By arguing that ‘well defined national aspirations shall be accorded the utmost satisfaction that can be accorded to them’ (Wilson, 1918), Wilson proposed to establish populations, or ‘nations’, as the fundamental unit of legitimate political organisation, as opposed to imperial states or ruling monarchical or imperial families. This in turn provided political legitimacy to a wide range of new ‘nation-states’, and remains a potent expression of what is broadly referred to in academia as the ‘nationalist theory’ of self-determination.

Post-Second World war narrowing: self-determination as decolonization

Despite Wilson's attempts to promote self-determination as a crucial principle of international politics, the notion itself was not retained as a core principle of the League of Nations, re-emerging instead as an international principle in the United Nations Charter following the Second World War (Sterio, 2013). While the definition of self-determination – and the extent to which it is legitimate – remained vague, a different conception of self-determination emerged gradually following the Second World War that would build on, yet narrow, the focus of Wilsonian self-determination. While Wilsonian self-determination granted legitimacy to all mobilized national or ethnic groups with 'national aspirations', self-determination understood as the right to secede from larger political units and form an independent state was broadly understood as being a right restricted to colonized people (Sterio, 2013).

Several United Nations resolutions and Covenants throughout the 1960s and 1970s re-established 'self-determination' as a legitimate principle applying to all peoples. United Nations General Assembly resolution 1514 in 1960 for instance, states that 'all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development' (United Nations, 1960a). The resolution however then specifically mentions 'Non-Self-Governing territories or all other territories that have not yet attained independence' as being the primary concern of the resolution, before stating that 'any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations' (United Nations, 1960a). This distinction established a clear dichotomy between self-determination as it applies to colonial territories, and self-determination as it may apply to non-colonized people: while colonial territories are encouraged to 'self-determine' (understood, in resolution 1541, as either independence, free association with the colonial state or incorporation into another independent state) (United Nations, 1960b) non-colonized people are not perceived as being legitimate in attempts to challenge or undermine the territorial integrity of existing countries – restricting external self-determination to colonized populations only (Sterio, 2013).

The notion of external self-determination as applying primarily to colonized populations was further reinforced in subsequent United Nations publications. The 1970 *Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations* re-iterated both

the commitment to self-determination for colonized populations and the commitment to territorial integrity found in the 1960 resolution, further emphasising the importance of self-determination to bringing a ‘speedy end to colonialism’ (United Nations, 1970).

Further narrowing: self-determination as a ‘Remedial Right Theory’

In the decades following the decolonization of most former colonial territories, the boundaries of legitimate self-determination shifted further. The collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early and mid-nineties respectively, provided a significant number of potential case studies for self-determination, encouraging academic debate on what the conditions are, and ought to be, for a legitimate, unilateral, external self-determination.

Responding to contemporary events, academics such as Buchanan developed what is broadly referred to as ‘remedial’ or ‘Remedial Right Only’ theories of self-determination (Moore, 1998b; Buchanan, 2003). While Buchanan’s approach attempts to satisfy a wide range of criteria as desirable (such as positive incentive creation with regard to decentralization and clarity on the question of territory), one of the major aims of the theory, and perhaps the most relevant for the legitimacy of external self-determination, is to ‘isolate and proliferate’ (Buchanan, 2003) – isolate external self-determination to exceptional cases, while proliferating intra-state autonomy and self-government (internal self-determination).

To isolate cases of external self-determination, Buchanan proposes to restrict unilateral secession to a number of clear, exceptional cases: grievous, systematic human rights abuses, unjust annexations, severe violations of intra-state autonomy agreements and secession from failed states in which human rights can no longer be guaranteed (Buchanan, 2003)(Moore, 1998b). As indicated by his ‘isolate and proliferate’ idea, Buchanan therefore not only restricts external self-determination to exceptional circumstances for unilateral secessions or to negotiated, mutual consent secessions – but established internal self-determination, or intra-state self-government and autonomy, as the primary norm of self-determination and first resort for peoples and national groups within other states (Buchanan, 2003).

In addition to this, Buchanan’s approach provides further clarity not just on the criteria that constitute legitimate causes for the pursuit of unilateral, external self-determination by peoples within another state, but also on the ways in which states and governments sustain, or lose, legitimate control over parts of their territory. Basing the legitimacy of states on their ability to treat citizens and groups within their territory justly and protect human rights

(Norman, 1998), Buchanan also provides a clear distinction between what legitimises the pursuit of unilateral self-determination and what legitimises an existing or a new state in the international system, adding an extra layer that does not particularly appear in the context of post-World War Two international law on self-determination (Buchanan, 2003).

In addition to academic normative theory creation, the idea of unilateral external self-determination as being restricted to a remedial right only can also be found in international law. With academics frequently describing remedial secession as being the only legitimate form of secession in the international system today (Norman, 1998; Sterio, 2013). ‘Remedial Right Only’ approaches to unilateral external self-determination were also significantly drawn upon by the Canadian Supreme Court in its 1998 reference on the Secession of Quebec, in which the Canadian Supreme Court argued that Quebec had no legitimate right to unilateral secession insofar as it enjoyed extensive internal self-determination within Canada and suffered from no major human rights violations (CanLII, 1998).

As I have seen above, academic theorizing on self-determination as well as international law have evolved over time, shifting the conditions and grounds for legitimate, unilateral self-determination from a general right granted to all national groups, to colonies, to specifically and systematically repressed people within a given state. However, in the current rhetoric of minority nationalist parties, self-determination as a concept is frequently supplemented and legitimised by another notion: that of democracy.

Minority nationalist parties: democracy as legitimising process

The central role played by democracy in providing legitimacy to minority nationalist aims in their rhetoric is twofold. Firstly, as we will see below, there is a clear understanding amongst all minority nationalist parties that a broad, majoritarian and explicit consensus is required for them to achieve their goals. However, once the existence of such a consensus appears to be established notably through victories or significant successes in elections, minority nationalist parties will argue that the mandate secured through elections is sufficient to legitimise sometimes wide-ranging changes or reforms to the political system in which they operate. In other words, minority nationalist parties across all three territories analysed are focused on constructing strong, majority support with the understanding that such majority

support will then legitimise at the very least far-ranging internal self-determination, and, in most cases, secession.

During the period I analysed, the importance of securing a very broad and explicit support before pushing for significant change was exemplified notably by the attitude adopted by the SNP on the issue of Scottish independence. Despite overwhelming success in the United Kingdom general election in May 2015, the Scottish First Minister and leader of the SNP, Nicola Sturgeon, was notably keen to emphasise that the election success her party had enjoyed was not fundamentally a mandate for a second Scottish independence referendum, arguing that this had not been the issue for which people had supported the SNP in the general election. In a statement published shortly after the election, Nicola Sturgeon argued:

It is no secret to anyone that the SNP supports independence – we always will. But I made clear during the campaign that this election was not about independence – it was about making Scotland’s voice heard at Westminster. I said clearly to people in Scotland that I would not take a vote for the SNP as an endorsement of independence or of a second referendum. And let me be absolutely clear that I stand by that. There will only be another independence referendum if the people of Scotland vote in a future Scottish Parliament election to have one. That is democracy. (Scottish National Party, 2015h)

The position highlighted in the quote above was reiterated almost word for word a year later, in the run up to the Scottish parliamentary elections in May 2016 (O’Leary, 2016). However, alongside these electoral achievements, the SNP also sought to build up support for independence and to create this explicit majority support for one of the party’s main aims. This campaign, which began in the aftermath of the EU membership referendum in 2016, focused on persuading ‘a majority of our fellow citizens’ and creating a ‘strong and positive majority’ in favour of independence (Brooks, 2016a). Both the SNP’s emphasis on election results and popular support and their refusal to treat any election success as a mandate for all of their core aims highlights the perceived necessity, by minority nationalists in Scotland, to secure explicit, majority popular support to provide legitimacy to some of their more far-reaching aims, of which independence is a strong example.

The importance placed on democratic support as a legitimising factor is not only obvious in the SNP’s approach to independence as an objective, but also in its approach to the other demands the party have made in the run up, and in the aftermath of the General Election

in 2015 and the Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2016. As an example, much of the SNP's rhetoric in the aftermath of the May 2015 general election emphasised the need for SNP proposals to be treated seriously by the United Kingdom government. In a speech regarding government proposals for further devolution to the Scottish parliament, the Deputy Leader of the SNP, Stuart Hosie, directly correlated the SNP's results in the May 2015 general election and the need for the British government to accept the SNP's demands for further powers than those promised in initial proposals. Highlighting the extent of SNP support in Scotland (50%), Stewart Hosie argued that the SNP achieved those scores on a 'manifesto that set out clear priorities for strengthening the Scotland Bill' (Scottish National Party, 2015e). In a later speech, Stewart Hosie further likened what he perceived as shortcomings in government proposals for devolution to the government failing 'the people of Scotland once again'. (Scottish National Party, 2015f). These two examples of rhetoric emphasise the idea that, due to the democratic mandate the SNP secured in elections, not only are the SNP's demands legitimate, but opposition to them by the British government would, by extension, be illegitimate. A further example, drawn from a comment by the SNP House of Commons leader Angus Robertson, further evidences this:

The Scotland Bill published by the UK government is woefully lacking – failing to meet even the limited powers set out in the Smith Commission and falling far short of the aspirations of people in Scotland as expressed so firmly at the General Election (Scottish National Party, 2015d)

This further highlights the notion that a democratic mandate strongly legitimises minority nationalist party demands for wide ranging and major political, or in this case institutional, reform. Democratic support is understood to be a pre-condition for the achievement of the aims of the SNP, with this belief in turn informing the post-electoral success belief according to which reform is the only legitimate option available.

The comparatively tenuous situation in Catalonia provides an even stronger example of these beliefs in action in minority nationalist parties. The discourse explaining the creation of the *Junts Pel Sí* (together for Yes), a pro-independence coalition composed of two major minority nationalist parties CDC and ERC as well as other independent politicians for the September 2015 autonomous elections also highlights the centrality of domestic democracy in the strategy of Catalan minority nationalist parties. In fact, minority nationalist politicians

argued very frequently throughout the period studied that the September elections were in fact plebiscitary elections akin to a referendum on independence. Indeed, a CDC social media post argued that the ‘plebiscitary elections on the 27th of September will allow us to count how many people are in favour of independence and how many are not’, (La Vanguardia, 2015b) with Raul Romeva, the lead candidate for the *Junts Pel Sí* electoral list, going as far as saying that the elections in September are ‘not autonomous elections, but an “all or nothing” plebiscite’ (Convergents - CDC, 2015h) and the ‘the independence referendum that the Spanish state refused to let us have’ (Esquerra Republicana, 2015l).

The last quote highlights another important element used by Catalan minority nationalist parties to justify considering the September elections as plebiscitary elections: their perceived lack of national democracy in Spain, which provides an additional source of legitimacy for their pursuit of self-determination by introducing certain elements of remedial theory into their discourse. In a series of social media interventions, Raul Romeva argued that the reason why *Junts Pel Sí* were now pursuing a mandate for independence was because of the Spanish government’s unresponsiveness to majority demands from the Catalan population. In the process, he highlights a number of events that according to him, highlight the lack of democracy in Spain: the rejection of a referendum on independence organised by the Catalan government on the 9th of November 2014, the cancellation by Spanish courts of a new autonomy statute in 2010, and also the continued refusal to organise a referendum on independence despite overwhelming public opinion support for such a consultation (Romeva i Rueda, 2015e, 2015b, 2015d, 2015c). The idea that the Spanish government obliged Catalan minority nationalist parties to organise an independence referendum or plebiscite is a recurrent theme in their rhetoric throughout the period studied (Esquerra Republicana, 2015e, 2015m; Junts Pel Sí, 2015i).

Echoing similar trends in Scotland, the notion of Catalan domestic democracy as legitimising self-determination continued to play a central role in minority nationalist discourse after the September elections, notably by allowing minority nationalist parties in Catalonia to present not only their demands as legitimate, but opposition to them as illegitimate. With an overall majority of 72 seats shared between *Junts Pel Sí* (62) and the far-left, pro-independence party *Candidatura d’Unitat Popular* – CUP (10), minority nationalists argued immediately that the Catalan electorate had granted them a strong mandate for independence (Vilaweb, 2015). Sergi Sabria, one of the newly elected *Junts Pel Sí* members of parliament, said shortly after the election results that ‘the elections were a referendum and we won; this is a victory for

enthusiasm and change. The next step is independence’ (Esquerra Republicana, 2015k). This sentiment was echoed by Artur Mas, who argued that ‘We now have democratic approval to continue with the process’ (Convergents - CDC, 2015b). He also went on to salute the September election results as a time where ‘Catalonia behaved as a nation, exercising the right to self-determination and the right to choose its own institutions’ (Convergents - CDC, 2015d). In the months following the 2015 elections, pro-independence members of parliament prepared and voted to establish an official roadmap towards independence, a significant step that was similarly justified in terms of the respect for domestic democracy (Esquerra Republicana, 2015l; La Vanguardia, 2015a).

One of the outcomes of this process towards independence was a decision to hold a unilateral referendum on independence on the 1st October 2017, an event which significantly heightened the tensions between minority nationalists in Catalonia and the central Spanish government. During and in the immediate aftermath of this event, the rhetoric of both sides focused on delegitimising the opposing side, with the Spanish government focusing primarily on the legitimacy of constitutional law and the minority nationalists, again, focusing on the legitimacy of democracy as a way to impose change. The referendum itself, which was marred by violence (Jones and Burgen, 2017), produced an outcome of over 90% of voters in favour of independence, which was understood by minority nationalists as a mandate for unilateral independence, with Catalan President Carles Puigdemont describing the result as ‘the people’s will for Catalonia to become an independent state’ (BBC News, 2017a). The Spanish government, on the other hand, argued that because the Spanish Constitution does not recognise referendums, the referendum itself was an ‘illegal act’ (Ortega Mayor, 2017), an argument which gradually became a complete denial that any sort of meaningful referendum had taken place in Catalonia (Noguer, 2017). Following the referendum, a ‘suspended’ declaration of independence was made by the Catalan Parliament (Badcock and Crisp, 2017) and, subsequently, the Spanish government suspended the Catalan parliament and government using article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, which allows the government to suspend the autonomy of a given region for ‘failing in its obligations under the Spanish Constitution’ or for ‘acting against the interests of Spain’ (Cortes Generales, 2011). On the grounds that the decision suspended a democratically elected government, minority nationalist parties described the decision as a ‘coup’ (El Plural, 2017; Público, 2017; Torregrosa, 2017), again drawing on the idea that democracy remains a fundamental legitimising factor for self-determination, even if unilateral and in contradiction with other stable norms such as constitutional law.

The centrality of democracy as a legitimising factor is also strongly visible in the case of Corsican minority nationalist parties. Long characterised by a split between moderate groups, focused on the political achievement of greater autonomy for the island and represented by the *Femu a Corsica* coalition, and radicals such as *Corsica Libera*, focused on sometimes violent action to achieve independence (Olivesi, 1998; Hepburn and Elias, 2011), the minority nationalist political family in Corsica underwent a significant shift with the cease-fire announced by the FLNC in August 2014, and the mandating of radical nationalist political party *Corsica Libera* to pursue independence using peaceful political means (Corsica Radio, 2015; U Ribombu Internazionale, 2015). The legitimising force of democracy played an important role in motivating this process, as described by Jean-Christophe Angelini, one of the leading figures in *Femu a Corsica*: ‘when the majority [of Corsican nationalists] supported the clandestine struggle [of the FLNC], we were always accused of being a minority, anti-democratic movement’ (Corsica Infurmazione, 2015b). This shift, saluted as a ‘new era’ by the leader of *Corsica Libera* Jean-Guy Talamoni (U Ribombu Internazionale, 2015), was also widely praised by Corsican nationalists across the two main political parties as an unprecedented opportunity for nationalist electoral success and political action (Alta Frequenza, 2015b, 2015a; U Ribombu Internazionale, 2015). Gilles Simeoni for instance, leader of *Femu a Corsica*, described the move away from violence in the following terms: ‘We are making, all together, the choice to build a future of hope for Corsica in a democratic way, to move away with dignity from a situation of conflict that has lasted for the best part of 50 years’ (Alta Frequenza, 2015c).

In addition to this shift, at the start of the period of this data analysis, Corsican nationalists were in the process of proposing a series of measures, often reflecting long-standing nationalist demands, to be put to a vote in the Corsican Assembly. In the years running up to 2015, under the influence of *Corsica Libera* representatives in the Corsican territorial assembly, a number of key policies, reflecting Corsican nationalist demands for many decades, were voted in by large majorities including moderate and radical nationalists as well as non-nationalist representatives. An example of these key reforms would be for instance the recognition of Corsican as an official language in Corsica (Corse Matin, 2013; France 3 Corse Via Stella, 2013). The creation of a residency status was also voted by a large majority, so that people wishing to own property in Corsica will now require to have lived there for at least five years prior to purchasing property on the island (Corse Matin, 2014; Le Figaro, 2014b). Finally, the Corsican assembly also voted in favour of a number of fiscal reforms, asking for existing

fiscal powers to be transferred to the Corsican assembly and for the creation of specific fiscal arrangements to recognise local specificities (Corse Net Infos, 2014). The adoption of all these reforms by large majorities comprising both nationalist and non-nationalist elected representatives has led *Corsica Libera* to argue that some of the demands defended by the Corsican nationalist movement for the past few decades had now become supported by a majority of the island's political actors and by a majority of Corsican society (Corsica Libera, 2015; Corsica Radio, 2015; U Ribombu Internazionale, 2015). These reforms have gone on to form the bulk of what Corsican nationalists now call the '*prugettu cumunu*', or 'common project' around which both *Corsica Libera* and *Femu a Corsica* sought to build support for the December 2015 elections to the Corsican territorial assembly (Corse Matin, 2015).

As in the case of Catalonia and Scotland, the importance of a broad based coalition of support for minority nationalist demands was central to the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties in Corsica. Talking at a political conference regrouping a variety of supportive political figures from within and outside the Corsican nationalist movements, Jean-Guy Talamoni described the need to expand support for the '*prugettu cumunu*' to all political and civil society actors in Corsica, and to build on what he perceived as the very broad support for the reforms put forward by Corsican nationalists in Corsican society (Corsica Infurmazione, 2015c). Jean-Marie Poli, an elected representative for *Corsica Libera*, similarly spoke of a desire of all Corsicans to unite in building a durable, peaceful political project, saluting the role of civil society in promoting and building support for the measures proposed by Corsican nationalists in the Corsican Assembly (Corsica Infurmazione, 2015d). As these two examples highlight, the notion of majority democratic support acts as a significant factor in establishing the legitimacy of minority nationalist political action in the eyes of minority nationalist parties themselves.

Similarly to the two other cases, following the victory of Corsican nationalist parties in the French regional elections in December 2015 (Willsher, 2015), the role played by the concept of democracy in the rhetoric of Corsican nationalist leaders moved away from the necessity of building a broad support base towards the notion that the mandate obtained in the regional elections legitimises Corsican nationalist demands and renders what nationalist parties perceived as governmental opposition or unwillingness illegitimate. Speaking soon after the elections, Gilles Simeoni, newly elected chief of the Corsican regional executive (the governing body attached to the Corsican Assembly), established dialogue with the French government as an essential priority, arguing that:

Taking into account the decisive nature of the historic moment currently unfolding in Corsica, and taking into account the results of the territorial [regional] elections, and beyond the electoral result, taking into account the immense aspiration both to change and to the democratic life of our society expressed in Corsica in December 2015, it is essential that a real dialogue is opened with the [French] state. (Collectivité Territoriale de Corse, 2015)

Continuing from this quote, Simeoni added that the dialogue with the French state should not be restrictive, but should instead be open to all points and all issues (Collectivité Territoriale de Corse, 2015). Simeoni highlights the idea of democracy as providing legitimacy for wide ranging political and institutional reform, an idea that we highlighted previously in the rhetoric of both Scottish and Catalan minority nationalist political actors.

As negotiations faltered and Corsican nationalist parties became increasingly disillusioned with the process they had hoped to open with the French state, the tone of the Corsican nationalist rhetoric shifted and the emphasis on democratic legitimacy was further strengthened. Speaking about the early stages of the dialogue with the French government, Jean-Guy Talamoni regretted the rejection, by the French government, of all the reforms voted in the Corsican Assembly prior to the 2015 regional election, describing this position as ‘unacceptable in today’s and tomorrow’s Europe’ (France 3 Corse Via Stella, 2016) and restating that:

We will never stop carrying the message for which we were elected, until the will of the people is realised. This is simply called democracy; we will carry out what we said we would do. [...] We will continue to carry to voice of our people. We were elected for this and we will not fail in this task (France 3 Corse Via Stella, 2016)

Such sentiment was later stated in a *Corsica Libera* newsletter in April 2016, calling upon the French government to ‘understand the historic political situation in which Corsica finds itself today, and to follow through with earlier commitments to open a dialogue on all of the Corsican Assembly’s reforms, including the reforms that require a revision of the constitution’ (Corse Matin, 2016). What Corsican nationalists perceived to be the illegitimacy of the French government’s positions in view of the electoral results achieved by them in the regional elections is further exemplified by the exasperated comment made by Gilles Simeoni

soon after a meeting with French government officials on the topic of institutional reform in Corsica:

‘If the government seeks to impose [institutional reform] without taking into account any of the aspirations of Corsica, notably the wishes and demands expressed by the Corsican Assembly, it will be its choice, a unilateral choice at the polar opposite of a negotiated political solution. If the government persists in this position, it will prove that the unanimous votes of the Corsican Assembly are systematically ignored and dismissed. The historic political situation that emerged with the election of Corsican nationalists to positions of responsibility, representing the hopes Corsicans have for a change in the political system and in our relationship with the state, will remain unanswered by the government.’ (Corse net Infos, 2016)

As we have seen in all three cases, democracy and democratic legitimacy play a crucial role in the rhetoric, strategy and ideas of minority nationalist parties. Firstly, whether in Catalonia, Scotland or Corsica, these parties clearly perceive broad-based popular support as a requirement for the pursuit of their core aims, be it reform or independence. This belief in the necessity of popular support, when carried over into a context in which these parties secure significant electoral successes in their respective territories, forms the basis of the one of the key ways in which minority nationalist parties rely on the notion of democracy to legitimise their demands. Whether one looks at the demands for further devolution in Scotland, the demands for independence in Catalonia or the demands for widespread reform in Corsica, the democratic mandate these parties perceive to have secured in elections is frequently used as an argument to render illegitimate any form of significant opposition from national governments, whether one looks at the unsatisfactory devolution proposals made by the United Kingdom government or the far broader opposition provided by both the French and Spanish governments in response to minority nationalist demands within their own territory.

However, aside from their discourse, the importance placed upon democratic legitimacy by minority nationalist parties also influences strategic, electoral decisions made by these parties. As we will see in the following section, minority nationalist parties in Corsica and Catalonia, who have to contend with other competing minority nationalist parties, adopted similar strategies to maximise their chances of victory (and of securing clear democratic legitimacy) in the elections observed in 2015 and 2016.

Impact of democratic legitimacy on electoral strategy

Minority nationalist parties in Catalonia, notably the CDC and ERC, developed a similar strategy to that of their Corsican counterparts by choosing to pursue outright electoral success through electoral coalition. By establishing the *Junts Pel Sí* coalition to contest the September 2015 Catalan autonomous elections (the elections to Catalonia's autonomous parliament), both parties developed a common rhetorical platform to justify and pursue a shared aim of independence from the Spanish state (Convergents - CDC, 2015a; Junqueras, 2015a). This decision to join forces for a domestic election despite significant ideological differences between both the CDC and ERC (Junts Pel Sí, 2015f) highlights the importance both minority nationalist parties give to domestic electoral success to achieve the aim of independence.

Although both the CDC and ERC joined forces under the *Junts Pel Sí* label for most of the period studied here, significant similarities in discourse, notably on the desirability and feasibility of independence, were apparent even prior to the official announcement establishing this common electoral platform. The period analysed in this thesis notably starts with the collapse and disappearance of the CiU party federation into two separate parties, CDC and *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya*. The split was notably caused by what *Unió* called the abandonment of negotiations and the choice of unilateralism by the CDC's leader and outgoing Catalan President Artur Mas (La Vanguardia, 2015b). Indeed, although *Unió* would go on to defend a more cautious approach centred on negotiation and constitutional reform under the slogan '*La revolució del Seny*' (the revolution of prudence, of common sense), The CiU's rhetoric on the necessity for independence had already become, by the start of the period analysed here, significantly closer to that already used by its main left-wing competitor, the ERC. Artur Mas for instance was quoted on CiU social media accounts as arguing that the 'Spanish constitution had, after 37 years, become a dead end for the democratic aspirations of the Catalan people', highlighting that 'prior to calling elections, the President has attempted all possible juridical, political and democratic options to agree to a referendum [on independence]' (CiU, 2015b, 2015a). This feeling was notably echoed by ERC leader Oriol Junqueras, who was quoted again in official social media accounts arguing that his main opponent was not the CDC, but 'a state that tirelessly works against Catalonia and its citizens', arguing the importance of 'creating a pro-independence majority on the 27th of September, a majority that can sustain the creation of a new Catalan Republic' (Esquerra Republicana, 2015j; Junqueras, 2015a).

The absence of political violence at the heart of Corsican nationalism for the first time in almost forty years has created a situation where the totality of Corsica's nationalist movement is now committed to a domestic-oriented, electoral strategy to achieve its aims. In the period studied, the campaign for the elections to the Corsican Territorial Assembly in December 2015 provided ample opportunity for Corsican nationalists from both *Corsica Libera* and *Femu a Corsica* to further detail their strategy and to provide further explanation of the ways in which they understand and seek to take advantage of the new political environment in which they now operate.

Nationalist unity is undoubtedly one of the prominent features and discussion points of the campaign for the upcoming territorial elections. Jean-Christophe Angelini, one of the leading politicians in *Femu a Corsica*, highlighted in a radio interview the need for a 'national convergence' between the two 'offers' within Corsican nationalism (Alta Frequenza, 2015d). This feeling was notably echoed by veteran nationalist and *Femu a Corsica* politician Jean Biancucci, who argued in another radio interview that creating a nationalist coalition in the upcoming territorial elections is essential to create the conditions of a nationalist project able to secure a wide consensus (Alta Frequenza, 2015). Securing this wide consensus around a common nationalist project is something that Biancucci sees as essential for the prospect of securing nationalist achievements. In the same interview, he goes on to argue that creating nationalist unity for elections is the best way to:

'ensure that our project is the most stable and reliable and to ensure that it is a clear project in terms of people, ideas, and policies so that Corsicans can back us and ensure that we are, after the second round of the elections, a political force able to gather other ideas and other people around us'. (Alta Frequenza, 2015e)

The commitment to a wide nationalist coalition is also something that permeates the rhetoric of *Corsica Libera*. Like *Femu a Corsica*, *Corsica Libera* defends the idea of a nationalist coalition to secure electoral victory at the territorial elections in 2015, reusing the term 'national convergence' (Alta Frequenza, 2015e) and promoting it as the only way to ensure that the reform package voted by the Corsican assembly is accepted and recognised by the French government. According to Jean-Guy Talamoni, the purpose of this election is to ensure a Corsican nationalist government able to negotiate with the French government to secure the reform package and enforce the acceptance of reforms, such as the granting of official status

to the Corsican language, that have been squarely rejected by the French government until now (AFP, 2013; Corsica Radio, 2015).

This commitment to electoral unity further echoes the changed political circumstances in which Corsican nationalism operates today. From a political family which was considered by observers to be firmly divided between radicals and moderates (Olivesi, 1998; Hepburn and Elias, 2011). Corsican nationalists are now driven by a strategy in which unity and electoral success form a cornerstone. The commitment to unity at election time notably enabled minority nationalists in Corsica to accede to regional power for the first time in their history at the December 2015 elections (Willsher, 2015), a feat which was repeated two years later (Lamothe, 2017).

The centrality of democratic legitimacy to minority nationalist discourse, as well as their varying ability to impose their demands on sometimes reluctant central governments, brings forward another essential question in the debate on self-determination: the question of mutual consent. In addition to this, although the commitment to democratic and electoral politics by minority nationalist parties in Scotland, Corsica and Catalonia can be perceived as opportunistic, social constructivist concepts such as mutual constitution, rules and norm diffusion provide us with the necessary tools to provide an analysis that moves beyond the idea of opportunism, to show how exactly minority nationalist parties are attempting, by providing a sustained challenge to their respective central governments and the legal or political norms they embody, to alter the political framework within which they operate in order to increase the perceived legitimacy of their demands and achieve their aims.

‘Democratic’ self-determination: referendums and mutual consent

The electoral success of minority nationalist parties over the 2015-2017 period is clear. However, from the independence referendum in Scotland in 2014, hailed by some as a model for mutual consent self-determination (Levites, 2015), to the crisis in Catalonia in 2017 and the apparent lack of significant change in Corsica since 2015, the impact of the democratic legitimacy gained by these parties seems to vary across cases.

However, the importance of democratic legitimacy, and the reason why minority nationalist parties believe it to be essential to secure their aims, can be explained with reference

to both the context in which they operate, and social constructivist concepts such as rules and norm diffusion.

For a new norm to emerge and become broadly adopted (internalized), a ‘critical mass’ of relevant actors needs to be persuaded, to the point where the new norm is accepted and implemented by most critical actors. Depending on the aims of minority nationalist parties at any given time, who the critical actors are varies significantly: in the case of parties seeking unilateral independence, the necessary actors can be considered to be both domestic voters in the territory they claim to represent, and the international community. In this particular case, approval from the international community in the form of public support and recognition, as well as the support of a majority of the population, is deemed necessary to put forward a legitimate claim to unilateral independence. Within these characteristics, the remedial-only international norm of self-determination described above further restricts the ways in which minority nationalist parties can put forward a legitimate claim to unilateral independence: they would be required, for their claim to be perceived as legitimate, to demonstrate significant abuses, violations of internal autonomy or self-government agreements or unjust annexation.

However, an additional norm needs to be taken into account with regard to self-determination and the international community: that of mutual consent. The norm can broadly be stated in those terms: ‘Secession, when conducted as the result of a mutual agreement between the state and the seceding territory, is legitimate’. Sterio argues that ‘had the Quebecois voted to separate from Canada in 1995, it is plausible to suggest that most of the outside world would have honoured the Canadian desire to split into two different states’, further stating that similar events took place relatively without controversy in the case of East Timor and, more controversially, in the case of Kosovo in 2008 (Sterio, 2013). The legal decision provided by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Reference re Secession of Quebec* in 1998 is frequently cited as being a benchmark on the issue of both unilateral and mutually agreed secession, arguing that while no right to unilateral secession exists without significant human rights violations or obstacles to self-government and participation in government (a similar case made by Buchanan), the central government of Canada could not ignore, and would be compelled to negotiate, in the event of a significant vote in favour of secession in Quebec, legitimising secession as a potentially valid outcome of a negotiated process between a given territory and the central government (CanLII, 1998; Buchanan, 2003; Summers, 2013).

However, while mutually agreed independence does significantly lower the bar for the acceptance of the international community, it also adds another critical actor to the process: the central government of the state within which the seceding territory finds itself. With respect to this point, minority nationalist parties in Scotland, Catalonia and Corsica have had different fortunes in attempting to secure the consent of the central government to either expand internal self-determination or secure external self-determination for several different reasons.

The first, and perhaps most practical reason, is that of geography. The respective size of Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland, and the political weight this provides to these territories in national political institutions, is insufficient for minority nationalist parties to impose their aims by acceding to power at the state level. Despite the SNP's dominant display at the 2015 General Election, the number of seats secured (56) represents less than 10% of the total number of seats in the United Kingdom parliament. While the SNP played a vocal and sometimes influential role at the state level following this election, their position was still far short of being able to impose its preferred policy options and norms on the central government of the United Kingdom. Similarly, although minority nationalist parties in Catalonia (specifically the CiU) were occasionally able to wield strong political influence at the state level by playing the role of 'kingmakers' in coalition negotiations, minority nationalist Members of Parliament from Catalonia are, by virtue of the size of their territory and the number of parliamentary seats they contest, condemned to playing a small, minority role in Spanish state political institutions. The problem is further exacerbated in Corsica, where the island contributes four members of parliament to France's 577-strong *Assemblée Nationale*. Even if politically dominant within Corsica, the chances of Corsican minority nationalists playing any role in the configuration of power at the French state level are remote.

Related to this issue is the one of the scope of minority nationalist party democratic legitimacy. While in all three cases, minority nationalist parties are strong, if not dominant, political forces within their respective territories (commanding significant electoral support), the extent to which this poses a problem to state-wide parties in terms of legitimacy or electoral support is questionable. Here again, the political context – and the norms that central governments commit to, either legally or politically, affect the extent to which minority nationalist parties are able to challenge state-level norms to legitimise and impose their aims.

In the context of Scotland, a number of historical and institutional factors come into play to strengthen the position of the Scottish government in relation to the central government,

while facilitating interactions between these two institutions. The nature of the Act of Union between England and Scotland, with the continued existence of several distinct Scottish institutions, contributed to the overall perception of the United Kingdom as a union of several equivalent ‘nations’, as opposed to a unitary state. The introduction of devolution in the late 1990s further strengthened this perception, by creating a Scottish government and Parliament whose hierarchical position in relation to the central United Kingdom government varied across issues. While some powers remained reserved to the Parliament in Westminster, the Sewel Convention established after devolution states that, on matters under the purview of the devolved authorities, the United Kingdom would not legislate without the consent of the Scottish authorities, placing these ‘sub-national’ institutions on an equal footing with the central government on a wide range of issues. This notion of the Scottish government and Parliament as institutions to be negotiated with, as opposed to subnational authorities to be coerced hierarchically, permeated the run-up to the 2014 independence referendum and its aftermath, and strengthened the relevance of Scottish-based democratic success as an efficient way to wield influence and power at the United Kingdom level. The success of the SNP in 2011 on a clear pro-independence platform led the United Kingdom government to open up the possibility of a discussion, and potentially a referendum, on the constitutional future of Scotland. The discussions led up to the Edinburgh Agreement in 2012, which set out a joint commitment to organise an independence referendum for Scotland, and the steps required to render this legal under domestic, constitutional law (Casanas Adam, 2014; Levites, 2015). The agreement symbolised the commitment by both central government and SNP-led Scottish government to organise a legal, decisive referendum, and a commitment to respect and implement the result. The democratic mandate obtained by the SNP in 2011, followed by the agreement by the central government to allow and implement the result of an independence referendum, legitimised independence as a possible constitutional option for the future of Scotland.

In both Catalonia and Corsica, minority nationalist parties have to contend with strong, and constitutionally codified norms that establish sub-national authorities in a clear, hierarchical position of inferiority over the central government, which represents a unified ‘nation’ (Cortes Generales, 2011; Assemblée Nationale, 2017). In both cases, sub-national authorities are not expected to execute or pursue any policy outside of their clearly defined legal and political purview, limiting the extent to which democratic success within those institutions grants direct, wieldable power at the state level.

In both cases, minority nationalist parties in Corsica and Catalonia then rely on attempts to persuade relevant actors that their demands, and the norms that underpin them, are indeed legitimate. This however can be difficult for a number of different reasons in both territories. While Catalonia, for instance, is a significant enough territory to draw the attention of the rest of Spain, Corsican minority nationalists struggle to broadcast their aims and messages outside of their domestic, Corsican electorate. Corsican nationalists therefore are constrained in their ability to persuade relevant actors, in this case the French central government either directly or through its electorate, that they legitimately represent a national group with all the representative powers this entails (their norm) as opposed to yet another local authority with managerial powers (the constitutional norm in place at the state level).

In Catalonia, similar difficulties emerge. While the crisis in Catalonia and Catalonia itself are significant enough to occupy the political agenda of Spain as a whole, Catalan minority nationalists have struggled to legitimate their norms in the eyes of the Spanish government and its electorate in the rest of Spain. Although the Spanish government's hostile response to Catalan claims remains unpopular in Catalonia, there are very little signs of this unpopularity spreading outside of the boundaries of Catalonia as a territory. As an example according to a poll, while 71% of Catalans support the idea of an independence referendum, 61% of people in the rest of Spain oppose this (Masreal, 2017); in other words, there is very little domestic or electoral necessity for the Spanish government to review and change the norm according to which independence referendums in a given territory within Spain are not constitutionally legal. If anything, there would appear to be an electoral incentive for the central government to continue adopting a harder stance.

With very little immediate political incentive for mutual consent over secession and independence in both Corsica and Catalonia, minority nationalist parties have adopted two different approaches – the pursuit of critical junctures, and de facto policy implementation (as opposed to de jure implementation).

Minority nationalist parties in Corsica, have, since they acceded to the government of Corsica, pursued a de facto policy implementation, in areas where the French government seems reluctant or unable to enforce alternatives. There are two major, symbolic policy areas in which this has taken place: representation and language. With regard to representation, both the Corsican Executive Council President Gilles Simeoni (the executive leader) and Corsican Assembly President Jean-Guy Talamoni (representing the Corsican Assembly) have

established themselves as ‘representatives of the Corsican people’ both within Corsica and at the state-level in France. This position, although based on no legal basis, has at least been partially validated by the French government, by allowing several official visits by both Simeoni and Talamoni to Paris to discuss their demands. In interviews with both politicians conducted for the purpose of this thesis (Appendix A, interviews 2 and 3), both discussed and promoted their role as a ‘two-headed’ representation of Corsica, its people, and their aspirations, recognising that this went beyond the strict legal powers given to their respective positions. The other important and symbolic aspect where de facto policy implementation has taken place is language. While the Corsican language remains unrecognised as an official language within Corsica (AFP, 2013), minority nationalist actors within the Corsican administration and Assembly have gradually increased the visibility and role played by the language in public life, increasing its use in written communication within administrative circles as well as verbal deliberation within the Corsican Assembly. In doing this, and in the absence of any coercive rejection from the central French government, Corsican minority nationalists challenge existing norms (such as the status of Corsica as ‘one of the regions of France’ or the exclusive official status given to the French language) through day-to-day action.

In Catalonia, in the absence of any negotiated, mutual consent solution to the demands made by minority nationalist parties, minority nationalist parties seem to have adopted a strategy based on ‘critical junctures’ to undermine and challenge the constitutional and political norms that act as obstacles to their demands. Critical junctures, as defined in the first chapter, are moments in which existing, stable, historically established norms, are challenged and sometimes undermined by significant events or crises. Since attempts to organise an independence referendum in 2014, minority nationalist have enjoyed significant success in subsequent elections, culminating in a major political crisis brought about by the 2017 independence referendum followed by the declaration of independence and the suspension of Catalan political autonomy. While the extent to which these events will benefit minority nationalist parties and their aims remains unclear at the time of writing, the crisis, which observers agree to characterise as the most significant in recent Spanish history (BBC News, 2017b), has led to a growing discussion, both domestically and internationally, of previously unchallenged, established constitutional norms and rules.

Conclusion

Self-determination, as a concept, has varied and changed throughout its history. Closely tied to the 19th century emergence of nationalism as a significant political force, initial understandings of self-determination in international politics granted a right to statehood to all mobilized national groups, or groups with ‘national aspirations’. In the post-Second World War context dominated by decolonization, the right was understood as primarily applicable to colonized people, with little legitimacy given to non-colonized attempts at secession. Finally, with the wave of secessions and new states brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, a new approach was developed to restrict secession in virtually all cases, except those where significant violations of human rights have taken place.

While the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties in Scotland, Catalonia and Corsica draws to varying degrees on nationalist and remedial vocabulary, by far the most important legitimising factor of these parties’ attempts at self-determination is democracy. For minority nationalist parties, democratic success within the political institutions of their territory is understood as the single, most important way to legitimise and achieve aims that sometimes go far beyond the strict, legal competencies of the positions and institutions to get elected to. The importance of democratic politics has had significant consequences on both the rhetoric, and the strategy of minority nationalist parties over time.

Much of the existing literature on minority nationalist parties stems from the party competition and comparative party studies disciplines, which often assume that the primary purpose of a party is to win elections and secure power (Hepburn, 2009a; Elias and Tronconi, 2011; Zuber, 2012; Elias, Szöcsik and Zuber, 2015). This thesis flips that relationship around, by arguing that parties, as one of the different types of norm entrepreneurs that can exist within a political system, are primarily concerned with promoting and implementing their normative preferences. Far from being the end-goal, elections are instead an extremely powerful legitimating tool minority nationalist movements can use to legitimate their demands in the eyes of other critical agents within the same political environment. While it is almost a universal tool in Western Europe, and one which carries a great deal of normative weight, minority nationalist movements need not inherently pursue electoral politics as a primary strategy, as the case of Corsica and the many political parties associated with the FLNC show (Olivesi, 1998; Poggioli, 2016).

Also, while electoral success at the very least indicates that voters within these territories consider minority nationalist aims legitimate, this does not inherently translate into a similar perception of legitimacy outside the boundaries of their territory. With self-determination requiring at least the legal support of the international community or the acceptance of the larger state (in addition to local support), minority nationalist parties have had varying degrees of success when trying to implement the policies and institutional changes they claim to have a mandate for. While in Scotland, historical and recent political developments means that the central government of the United Kingdom remained relatively open and flexible to address the demands brought forward by significant Scottish National Party electoral success, minority nationalist parties in Corsica and Catalonia have struggled to impose their demands and challenge strong, stable and recognised constitutional and legal norms.

In an attempt to do this, minority nationalist parties in both territories have adopted different strategies. In Corsica, minority nationalist parties have attempted to implement certain policy preferences without the legislative tools to provide a legal basis for them. Catalan parties have focused on creating ‘critical junctures’, or crisis moments during which established norms are perceived as under pressure or malfunctioning. Understanding their actions in this light allows us to analyse the rationale behind much of the brinkmanship that has characterised Catalan minority nationalist activity in the run-up and the aftermath of the October 2017 unilateral independence referendum and declaration.

In the following chapter, we will move away from the domestic focus of the last two chapters, focusing instead on one potential avenue for normative change that minority nationalist parties have attempted to engage with: European-level institutions and the European political arena.

5. Europe, Europeanisation and minority nationalist parties

Self-determination drives the rhetoric and actions of minority nationalist parties, underpinning and legitimising most of their demands. Many of those demands, whether identity-based, institutional or economic, often involve the central government of the state or states these minority nationalist parties operate within. Consequently, as I have described in the previous chapter, the domestic political sphere is particularly relevant for these parties in their pursuit of political legitimacy and change. When considering the life cycle of the norms put forward by minority nationalist parties as a challenge to established state norms, electoral success of the kind achieved by these parties in all three cases potentially represents a tipping point towards norm cascading, a point where a sufficient number of critical agents, in this case both the parties and a majority of the local electorate, support the new emerging norm to encourage other actors to comply as a result.

In some cases, as in Scotland in 2014, this is sufficient for minority nationalist parties to at least open up legal, state-sanctioned avenues for significant constitutional change. In other cases, however, despite perceived democratic legitimacy, minority nationalist parties struggle to either enforce the change they seek or to force the central government to consider the possibility of change. In these cases, despite the support of a majority of the electorate within their respective territories, minority nationalist parties were unable to secure enough support for their challenging norm, and were also unable to sufficiently weaken support for the established norm.

The domestic political arena, however, is not the only political arena in which minority nationalist parties can act to secure support for their positions. Several studies of minority nationalism assess the phenomenon within the broader, European-level institutional, political and normative landscape, focusing on the growing role of the European Union in the action of these parties. While the domestic arena is, undoubtedly, the main field of action for minority nationalist parties in the period studied here, these parties have also sought to gather support, persuade and act at the European level to forward their aims. While domestic electorates, local governments and central governments are clearly critical agents in the case of minority nationalist norm diffusion, many of these parties have also considered European leaders and European-level institutions as important actors to legitimate their demands in the face of central government opposition. Europe, as a discursive, political, institutional and normative environment, continues to be relevant to these parties.

The concept of ‘Europeanisation’, despite the variety of interpretations and definitions associated with it (Olsen, 2002), provides an interesting starting point to analyse the emergence of ‘Europe’ as a relevant political area. While much of the literature on Europeanisation addresses the impact of the European Union on national and subnational governance, very little of it addresses minority nationalist parties specifically. However, a growing body of work has been built focusing on the relationship between the European Union and minority nationalist parties. It is from these two bodies of literature that I will draw for the analysis in this chapter.

In the second part of the chapter, drawing upon the example of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) but also on broader notions of the emergence of a European polity, I will explain how Europe, as a political space, is an all-encompassing and relevant arena for the challenging of rules and the pursuit of policy and political alternatives. Minority nationalist parties, although increasingly indifferent to the formal institutions of the European Union, remain fully invested in this European political space, through which they seek to legitimise their own demands while undermining continued state opposition to their demands.

Finally, in the third part of the chapter, I will analyse minority nationalist party rhetoric in Corsica, Catalonia and Scotland. I will focus on the extent to which Europe is present in day-to-day rhetoric, the extent to which it is portrayed as a positive thing, and the extent to which this corresponds with previous understandings of minority nationalist party stance on Europe. Analysing this will provide additional important points regarding Europe as an avenue for change and a critical agent in the norm diffusion process.

Europeanisation: a relevant concept?

‘Europeanisation’, as a concept, describes a broad range of phenomena that relate to the emergence and consolidation of ‘Europe’, more specifically European-level political institutions, as a normatively influential political framework and actor. Sometimes considered to be too diverse and too broad to be conceptually useful (Olsen, 2002, p. 921), the term has been defined and understood in a variety of ways by European studies academics, ranging from narrow definitions covering a single type of phenomena to broader definitions establishing ‘Europeanisation’ as a research perspective as opposed to a single concept.

Many understandings of Europeanisation, as is often highlighted in overviews of the concept, focus primarily on the impact of European Union policy, practices and integration and national or subnational political institutions (Borneman and Fowler, 1997; Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003; Delanty and Rumford, 2005; Headley, 2012), leading some academics to prefer ‘Unionisation’ or ‘EU-Europeanisation’ (Kohler-Koch, 2000). This approach can, for instance, be clearly seen in studies related to the multi-level governance research agenda that focus on the impact of European integration and policy on domestic political systems, a research focus most notable in comparative works on the gradual ‘Europeanisation’ of sub-national government in response to the European-level rules and practices surrounding cohesion policy and regional funding (Dąbrowski, 2012; Adshead, 2014). Such studies, often drawing on comparative analyses, often highlight the extent to which bureaucratic procedures and institutions have changed or even emerged to respond to new incentives and emerging political opportunities as a result of European Union integration and policy-making.

Other approaches however, adopt a broader understanding of Europeanisation. In his overview, Lenschow describes it as a ‘research perspective which brings into focus that Europe “matters” in the daily political life of national bureaucrats, politicians and the wider public (Lenschow, 2001). Borneman and Fowler distinguish between an ‘external’ and an ‘internal’ understanding of Europeanisation, with the ‘external’ understanding focusing on the growing importance of Europe as a form of identification and entity in the decades following the Second World War, and the ‘internal’ understanding focusing on the administrative and organisational power of the European Union (Borneman and Fowler, 1997). Other academics such as Aalberts, provide a constructivist understanding of Europeanisation, describing it as a process of construction, diffusion and ‘Europeanisation’ of rules, conventions, norms, beliefs and procedures which emerge first at the European level before seeping into the domestic level of politics (Aalberts, 2005, p. 11). Similarly, Radaelli describes the process of Europeanisation as “processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies” (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003, p. 17), with Featherstone describing Europeanisation as addressing, among other things such as institutional adaptation and ‘external’ policy impact (understood as the impact of Europe on non-EU states), the emergence of ‘new, cross-national policy networks and communities’ as well as ‘shifts in cognition,

discourse, and identity affecting policy in response to European developments’. (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003, p. 20).

While, as we have seen above, academics such as Radaelli and Aalberts adopt a clear top-down perspective when defining Europeanisation, other academics such as Tarrow and Delanty provide a slightly different approach. Understood as social change, Tarrow highlights the importance of ‘Europeanisation’, understood broadly as the gradual spread of political decision-making power and legitimacy to European-level institutions at the expense of what had been a strong national-level monopoly over political action since the 18th and 19th centuries, and the impact this has had over what he terms the ‘politics of contestation’, or the political activities, rhetoric, forms of organisation of social movements, political parties and other components of what is understood as ‘civil society’ in democratic states (Tarrow, 1995; Imig and Tarrow, 2001). Similarly, Delanty and Rumford describe an emerging ‘European’ polity, in which societal forces (citizenship, civil society) play a crucial role in discursively shaping European Union dynamics and political developments (2005). This approach, linking Europeanisation with the emergence of a European polity that is both within but also extends beyond the strict institutional boundaries of the European Union, provides another broad approach on which Europeanisation can be studied.

In an overview of Europeanisation as an academic concept, Featherstone and Radaelli identify up to eight different ways in which Europeanisation is used and understood in academic literature, a spectrum covering works on cultural diffusion, studies of the policy process at the European-level and studies on the foreign relations of European member-states (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003, p. 6). Other academics, such as Olsen, highlight several forms of coexisting Europeanisation. Olsen identifies enlargement, institutional development, central penetration of national systems of governance, political organisation normative exports and political unification as different forms of Europeanisation. (Olsen, 2002) While not exhaustive, we see that Olsen’s categorisation of the different approaches to Europeanisation all describe phenomena which are primarily related to the development of European institutions, most notably those of the European Union. Whether one looks at the changes in external boundaries (driven by European Union enlargement) or the central penetration of national systems of governance, which also relates to the impact of European Union institutions on the forms of governance found at the national and subnational level, these forms of

Europeanisation are driven by, and occur through, European Union supranational political institutions.

The impact of these forms of Europeanisation, however, is not limited to European Union institutions. While not all dimensions of Europeanisation highlighted by Olsen impact, or are relevant to, minority nationalist parties, several have provided them with significant opportunities to pursue normative change at the European-level, helping them to bypass sometimes hostile domestic environments to promote normative change above the level of the domestic state. Perhaps the most important way in which minority nationalist parties could push for direct, significant normative change lies in the European-level political institutions themselves, to which we turn our attention now.

European-level institutions

Identified as one form of Europeanisation by Olsen, and perhaps the most visible and structured form of Europeanisation, European-level institutions present a series of potential ‘access points’ through which political parties, including the minority nationalist parties analysed here, can potentially yield influence at the European level. While political parties can, through European institutions, find a new arena in which normative legitimisation or contestation can place, minority nationalist parties have frequently struggled to access European institutions, many of whom are broadly restricted to national governments. In this section, I focus on how minority nationalist parties have used, or failed to use, major European Union political institutions to put forward their normative and policy agenda.

European institutions The European Union remains, in the words used by Gilles Simeoni (nationalist President of the Corsican Assembly’s Executive Committee) during an interview conducted for this thesis, a “Europe of States” – a perception of Europe echoed by many minority nationalist actors and by the liberal intergovernmentalist school of European integration studies (Moravcsik, 1998). The centrality of member state national governments is best illustrated by the European Council, bringing together the government heads of each member state and wielding significant influence on a wide range of European-level policy issues (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Smith, 2003; Schimmelfennig and Moravcsik, 2009), and the Council of Ministers.

Functioning primarily according to intergovernmental rules and regrouping ministers from all member state national governments (Rosamond, 2000), the Council of Ministers is broadly

recognised as a central institution within the European institution. Hooghe and Marks describe it as one of the three key institutions within the European Union competing for legislative power (alongside the Commission and the European Parliament) (2001). They also describe the Council of Ministers as the main avenue for collective national government control, or in others words the key institution through which national governments are able to impose their collective will on the European policy-process. Although their policy mandates are often quite flexible, allowing the Commission a great deal of leeway when designing and implementing policies, countries acceding to the presidency of the Council of Ministers often come with detailed and concrete policy proposals to advance during their term (Hooghe and Marks, 2001).

The Council of Ministers, being an institution built on intergovernmental rules and regrouping ministers from national governments, is at first sight one of the least favourable institutions for minority nationalist party involvement in the European policy process. Indeed, this would require minority nationalist parties to obtain positions within national governments, something beyond the reach of most minority nationalist parties, with the exception of parties enjoying significant levels of support enabling them at best to enter government through coalition agreements or, alternatively to influence national government formation, as in the case of Catalan party CiU in the 1990s (Guibernau, 2006). Alternatively, independence accompanied by European Union membership would appear to be the only (and highly hypothetical) alternative for minority nationalist parties to potentially secure full access to the European Council and Council of Ministers. As an avenue to legitimise and pursue the kind of institutional changes minority nationalist parties seek, the Council of Ministers is undoubtedly the least accessible for these parties.

Short of direct access, Hooghe, Marks and Keating among others have argued that, since the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s, the Council of Ministers has opened itself in a limited way to subnational input. The treaty included a clause which allowed regional ministers to attend the Council of Ministers on behalf of their national governments on matters that affect regional interests. This opening, although limited, has led academics to argue that the Council of Ministers is no longer the sole preserve of national governments (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Keating, 2004) In practice, this opportunity has only been granted, depending on the domestic context, to the most powerful regions in Europe. For instance, although Spanish regions are well established constitutionally and have significant resources, their access to the Council of

Ministers has been limited. Even when access is granted to a region, it cannot act on behalf of its own interests: it is limited to represented the overall regional interests of all regions throughout the member state they represent (Hooghe, 1995; Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Beyond this limited and conditional access, Keating has also argued that alongside the opening up of the Council of Ministers by the Maastricht Treaty, the expansion of the European Union's powers to new areas since then has allowed national governments to regain control, through the Council of Ministers, on issues that were previously firmly within subnational purview (Keating, 2008a).

Another development in the practice of European Union policy-making further contributes to the limitations faced by minority nationalist parties attempting to contribute through the Council of Ministers. Academics have highlighted that although consensus decisions are still the norm within the Council of Ministers, this norm has been steadily weakening over time. According to Hooghe and Marks already in the 1990s, a quarter of decisions taken by the Council of Ministers overruled at least one member state government (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Follesdal and Hix highlight the same phenomena after enlargement, arguing that policy contestation was increasingly a feature of the Council of Ministers (Follesdal and Hix, 2006). For minority nationalist parties that might gain access to the Council of Ministers, this means that there is no guarantee that their voice will be heard and incorporated into a policy consensus. It is increasingly likely for any participant in the policy-process to be bypassed should he find himself a clear minority amongst other national governments. Although this problem will remain somewhat theoretical for most minority nationalist parties, it is undoubtedly an additional difficulty that participants can face once they gain access to the Council of Ministers and to intergovernmental policy-making at the European Union level.

While the European Council and Council of Ministers remain particularly closed to minority nationalist party participation, other European institutions have proved more practical as access points for these parties to the European Union policy process. The European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions are two important examples of such access.

The European Parliament is one of the institutions of the European Union that has been most strengthened over time. The European Parliament became a directly elected body with the first European elections in 1979, and it was increasingly consulted throughout the 1980s

before being granted a far greater role in European policy-making through the cooperation, assent and co-decision procedures introduced by the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty respectively (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 20). This strengthening of the European Parliament, partly motivated by demands for greater accountability and transparency at the European level has taken place at the expense of other European institutions, who can no longer disregard the European Parliament during the policy-making process (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, pp. 8–9). This affects especially the Council of Ministers, whose legislative proposals can be vetoed by the European Parliament (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 21).

Today, the European Parliament is still undoubtedly one of the three main European institutions to contest legislative powers at the European level, similarly to when Hooghe and Marks made the same remark in 2001. For instance, the European Parliament has the right to request legislation from the Commission, although it rarely does so (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). After the Amsterdam Treaty, an equal proportion of provisions at the European level involved either the co-decision, consultation or exclusion of the European Parliament, highlighting its growing legislative role in Europe (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 20). It therefore provides a direct platform for electorally successful parties to take part in European Union policy-making. Many regionalist parties have strong incentives to try and get access to the European Parliament (Lynch, 1998). Elections to the European Parliament are still widely considered to be second-order elections, providing opportunities for smaller, less successful parties to secure election. Election to the European Parliament also provides significant financial incentives for smaller parties, and it provides a unique platform upon which to raise awareness of issues (Lynch, 1998, p. 192).

One of the important ways in which minority nationalist parties have been active at the European level is through the European Free Alliance (EFA), a ‘europarty’ regrouping many, mostly Western European, minority nationalist parties into one European-level structure. The EFA was developed in 1979 in Bastia, Corsica, by nine separate minority nationalist parties. It was further strengthened at the European level by the Flemish party *Volksunie*, using their position and their strength in the European Parliament to establish the EFA. Initially, the EFA was established with four objectives in mind: increasing European parliamentary representation; increasing EFA membership; developing a common manifesto for European elections and also a wider common platform between member parties (Lynch, 1998).

A few years after its establishment, member parties developed a constitution for the EFA, formalising the organisation and establishing a few requirements for membership. Parties seeking membership were expected to be non-violent, democratic and electorally active. The 1983 constitution also included a limit of one party per region, to foster alliance-making at the local level, and established an observer membership alongside its formal, full membership. A reform in 1991 reinforced the electoral activity requirement, while also introducing a requirement for member parties to actively produce and distribute a newspaper or any other political literature (Lynch, 1998). These requirements, although unproblematic in the case of Scottish nationalism, have proven to be far more problematic in territories with divided nationalist movements (as in Catalonia), and in territories with a history of political violence, excluding parties that have traditionally supported or continue to support violence (as in Corsica). While membership of the EFA has been steadily growing from 9 in 1981, to 19 in 1983, 21 in 1992, 31 in 2007 and 43 today (Lynch, 1998; Lynch and De Winter, 2008; European Free Alliance, 2018), minority nationalism in two of our case studies, Catalonia and Corsica, remains partially represented, with major nationalist party PDeCAT in Catalonia and *Corsica Libera* in Corsica remaining outside of the EFA, undermining the EFA's ability to form a parliamentary group and its claim to be the voice of minority nationalism in Europe (Lynch, 1998; Lynch and De Winter, 2008).

Gaining European Parliament representation has generally been a challenge for the EFA. The EFA has never been able to create its own parliamentary group, resorting to alliances to create a sustainable parliamentary group. In 1979, the EFA was part of the 'Technical Co-Ordination Group', an extremely diverse group of parties whose primary purpose was to provide access to the benefits of being a member of a European parliamentary group. The 1984 elections saw the emergence of the Rainbow Group, which was one of the many iterations of the EFA coalition with Green Parties at the European Parliament. Despite promising electoral results in 1989, the Rainbow Group split and the EFA was left just short of being able to form a parliamentary group (Lynch, 1998, pp. 199–200). The 1994 elections saw a significant fall in EFA representation within the European Parliament, with EFA numbers falling to four MEPs (Lynch, 1998). The 1999 elections remain a high point for the EFA, with the re-emergence of the coalition between minority nationalists and Green parties and the formation of the Greens/EFA group, of which the EFA was the largest part (Lynch and De Winter, 2008). In 2004 however, the disappearance of the *Volksunie* as a single party crippled the EFA, whose

numbers fell to 5 MEPs out of a Greens/EFA group composed of 37 MEPs (Lynch and De Winter, 2008). EFA representation slightly increased after the last European elections in 2014, rising to 7 MEPs as part of a fifty-strong Greens/EFA group (European Free Alliance, 2015).

The disparity in size between EFA member parties also significantly affects the EFA's parliamentary representation and its influence at the European level. For instance, after 2004 elections, only three member states had EFA member party MEPs, with only seven parties gaining representation (Lynch and De Winter, 2008). In the current parliament, five EFA member parties have secured representation, with a number of other minority nationalist associating with the EFA group despite not being member parties themselves. This representation is limited to four member states: Belgium, the United Kingdom, Latvia and Spain (European Free Alliance, 2015). Despite the continuously growing number of members, the EFA does not seem to be able to attract parties that a significant prospect of winning representation in European elections, crippling their ability to form an independent group and limiting the impact of many of these parties at the European level.

The European Parliament represents a clear opportunity for minority nationalist parties to get engaged with the European policy-making process and to raise awareness of their issues and their claims. However, most minority nationalist parties are not electorally strong enough to secure representation in the European Parliament. The existence of the European Free Alliance helps to alleviate some of these difficulties, by providing a platform for many smaller parties to remain connected with the European Parliament and with larger parties that can broadly be understood as being in the same 'political family'. (Keating, 2004; Elias, 2008b; Lynch and De Winter, 2008). However, despite helping to reinforce and sustain these transnational ties, the influence of the EFA on the overall European policy process remains small.

The weakness of minority nationalist voices within the main European Union institutions, while an obstacle in 'normal' times, can become a significant handicap for minority nationalists in times of critical juncture, where European institutions and other European states are drawn into a major ongoing normative challenge and crisis. This was partly visible in the context of the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, and evident in the context of the attempted Catalan referendum in 2017. Discussions over the European Union membership or Scotland in the event of a 'Yes' vote in the 2014 independence referendum were central to the independence debate, and, while the SNP maintained that European Union

membership would be an automatic right for Scotland post-independence, many key political actors at the European level, such as European Commission President José-Manuel Barroso and European Parliament President Martin Schulz, expressed doubts or refused to confirm or deny whether the SNP's claims were valid (Carrell, 2012; Duncanson, 2014; Leask, 2014). While, due to the victory of the 'No' campaign in the independence referendum, the issue of Scotland's membership of the European Union never moved beyond the kind of discussions highlighted here, the crisis following Catalonia's attempted independence referendum in 2017 followed by its aborted declaration of independence provide another case to analyse the influence of minority nationalists at the European level.

The topic of Europe's attitude in relation to Catalan aspirations for independence, negotiated or unilateral if necessary, was one of the major topics discussed with Catalan MEP Ramon Tremosa i Balcells in an interview (Appendix A, interview 8). When confronted with the example of Scotland and the reservations expressed by European officials around the time of the Scottish independence referendum, Ramon Tremosa expressed optimism, describing his own experience of awareness-raising for Catalan demands in Europe, a process which, according to him, draws significant sympathy from a range of officials including ambassadors, European Union officials and fellow Members of the European Parliament. More importantly, Ramon Tremosa highlighted a belief that appears to have been shared across Catalan minority nationalists as the process towards the 2017 independence referendum began: the notion that, in a crisis, other European countries and the European Union itself, in the interests of the economy and stability, would side with the Catalan government against what he described as a potential excessive response from the Spanish government.

Although it is clear that the exact form in which the independence referendum and ensuing political crisis occurred was difficult to predict, the crisis in October 2017 provides a serious test for such a belief, and a serious case study for the real impact of awareness-raising and the normative engagement of minority nationalist parties at the European level. Despite widespread anger at the Spanish government's response to the independence referendum on the 1st of October 2017 both domestically (Jones and Burgen, 2017) and internationally (Human Rights Watch, 2017), European-level responses to the independence referendum and subsequent declaration of independence were almost unanimously in support of the Spanish government's stance. Major European figures, such as Commission President Juncker, criticised the Catalan government heavily (Pérez, 2017; Sollety, 2017), and other leaders from major European countries expressed clear support for the Spanish government (Pérez and

Abellan, 2017). Other European-level statements, such as the statement published on behalf of the European Parliament President, described the Catalan declaration of independence as a ‘breach of the rule of law, the Spanish Constitution and the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, which are part of the EU’s legal framework’ (Corazza, 2017). Statements by European Parliament political group leaders were almost unanimously opposed to the Catalan government’s position, with the single exception being the speech by German MEP Ska Keller on behalf of the Greens/European Free Alliance group, which cautiously supported the right to self-determination and called for further negotiations to put an end to the crisis (European Parliament, 2017).

Overall, while not definitive, the 2017 Catalan crisis appears to cast some doubt on the effectiveness of minority nationalist party engagement with the major institutions of the European Union. Faced with a critical juncture, very few European-level actors provided support for the normative challenge brought forward by Catalan minority nationalists.

The Committee of the Regions (CoR), although rarely considered as a major institution in the European Union framework, also provides an alternative venue for subnational actors, including minority nationalist parties, to participate in the European policy-making process and to make their voice heard at the European level.

The CoR was introduced as by the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s as a body attached to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) institutionally and financially, with no specific or distinct position or role in the emerging inter-institutional consultation process (Hooghe, 1995; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Domorenok, 2009). Despite what has been characterised by some as a ‘difficult inception’, the initial hopes around the CoR were that it would eventually grant subnational actors a central role in the European policy-making process (Elias, 2008a; Domorenok, 2009). Members of the CoR are appointed by their national governments, and although it was open to all, the Treaty of Nice in 2001 restricted membership to elected subnational officials, excluding MEPs (Carroll, 2011). The powers of the CoR are mostly restricted to advisory powers, leading many academics to argue that it relies solely on persuasion and lobbying to achieve its aims (Hooghe, 1995; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Keating, 2004). The scope of issues on which the CoR can exercise its powers is equally limited, being restricted to five key issues: education, health, culture, trans-European networks and economic and social cohesion. Aside from these issues however, the CoR is free to publish

‘own-initiative’ opinions on any other topic (Hooghe, 1995; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Carroll, 2011).

Despite early promise, the Committee of the Regions has broadly been a disappointment to minority nationalists (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Keating, 2004; Domorenok, 2009). From its inception, it has suffered from a wide range of difficulties, ranging from financial limitations to internal divisions to a lack of influence. Firstly, as I have seen the CoR’s powers remain limited, and the resources it benefits from to exercise these powers are equally limited. Secondly, the CoR is built upon a principle of equal representation, providing equal importance to all subnational actors ranging from regions to municipal governments (Keating, 2004). This has led to significant internal divisions between local and regional authorities, as well as a split between Northern European and Southern European subnational entities on the basis of different practices and resource inequalities (Hooghe, 1995; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Domorenok, 2009; Carroll, 2011). Whether for strong regions or for territories with a distinct identity and minority nationalist activity, being represented on an equal footing with municipal governments that share almost none of these characteristics represents a significant frustration, and does little to satisfy the demands for cultural and political recognition that characterise minority nationalist parties.

Some academics have also highlighted the limited impact of the CoR on the European Union policy-making process. Hooghe and Marks argue that the CoR wields little influence, and certainly does not frame any significant debates at the European level. Going further, they argue that not only the CoR has little impact, it is also rarely taken seriously outside of its opinions on cohesion and regional policy, which would indicate that even in areas where the CoR has formal powers, its voice is rarely taken into account adequately (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Domorenok, 2009). Keating adds that the CoR has had very little to show in terms of concrete results following its actions or the publication of an opinion, although Domorenok argues that it is not simple to isolate the impact of the CoR in a legislative environment composed of multiple, interrelated institutions (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Domorenok, 2009). Finally, another significant frustration for minority nationalist parties is the CoR’s unwillingness to try and modify domestic territorial relations, instead focusing on the implementation of multi-level governance across all states equally regardless of their

constitutional set up (Carroll, 2011). In other words, the CoR has done little to provide recognition, let alone constitutional change, to territorial minorities and minority nationalist parties who seek these changes first and foremost. Ever since the Treaty of Nice and the establishment of an electoral requirement, membership of the CoR has become closed to many minority nationalist parties who lack the electoral strength even to win local electoral mandates.

An analysis of the membership of the CoR originating from three subnational territories that interest us in this thesis (Catalonia, Corsica and Scotland) reveals a mixed picture for minority nationalist party presence in the CoR. In May 2015 (at the time of the data collection for this study), Corsica was only represented by one alternate member, Emanuelle de Gentili, who is now deputy mayor of Bastia and was elected on a minority nationalist list led by Gilles Simeoni of the party coalition *Femu a Corsica* (Le Figaro, 2014a; Committee of the Regions, 2015a). Catalonia on the other hand had one full member, Nura Marín Martínez from the *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (the territorial branch of the Spanish socialist party *PSOE*), and two alternate members including Roger Albinysa i Saigó of the CDC (now PDeCAT) the then Catalan government secretary to External Affairs and the European Union, and Jordi San Josep i Buenaventura, a member of the *Incitativa per Catalunya Verds* (ICV), a left-leaning ecologist party (Committee of the Regions, 2015b). Finally, Scotland had the most representatives in the CoR of the three cases analysed here, with five full members and one alternate member. Of the six members in total, two are affiliated with the SNP (Anthony Buchanan and Stewart Maxwell), two with Scottish Labour (Corrie McChord and Patricia Ferguson), one with the Conservatives (Barbara Grant) and one finally with the Liberal Democrats (Jim Hume) (Committee of the Regions, 2015c). Although minority nationalist parties have representation in each of the territories analysed above, they remain a small part of their overall national delegations and an even smaller part of the overall membership of the CoR (Carroll, 2011).

Despite the negativity surrounding the role and impact of the CoR in the European institutional environment, other academics argue that the CoR has been underestimated in academia (Domorenok, 2009, p. 144). Domorenok for instance recognises that during the first few years, the opinions published by the CoR were often bland and built on very low common denominator consensus. However, she argues that despite this initial critique over the quality of CoR opinions, there has been as marked and recognised improvement in the overall quality of CoR publications over time (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Domorenok, 2009). Domorenok makes a similar point with regards to the domains in which the CoR publishes opinions. Hooghe and Marks, in their evaluation of the CoR, highlight that during the first two years,

75% of the CoR's published opinions were 'own-initiative' opinions, which would tend to indicate that the CoR's efforts were scattered and often unsolicited by the other European Union institutions (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Since these early years however Domorenok describes how pressure was put on the CoR by the Commission to focus on mandatory and optional opinions, and also to produce fewer, but higher quality opinions. Consequently, mandatory and optional opinions have increased significantly, and 'own-initiative' opinions have similarly decreased over time (Domorenok, 2009).

Domorenok also argues that the position of the CoR within the European Union institutional framework has been strengthened since its early days. According to her, the CoR was gradually 'institutionalised' with gradual changes to its relationship with and position in relation to other European institutions (Domorenok, 2009). The CoR for instance has developed a strong relationship with the European Commission, which acknowledges or acts upon the overwhelming majority of CoR opinions (Carroll, 2011). Relations with other institutions such as the European Parliament or the Council of Ministers continue to be limited, although Domorenok argues that they are improving notably through a growth in networking between MEPs and CoR members (Domorenok, 2009).

The CoR has also developed a new role as a guardian of the principle of subsidiarity in the European Union, adopting a charter for multi-level governance in 2014 calling for systematic involvement of subnational actors in the development and implementation of any policy affecting regional interests (Lebrun, 2014). This new focus on subsidiarity, perceived by some to be a reaction to the perception of a democratic deficit within the European Union has allowed subnational authorities within the CoR to bring some of the pressures and the impact of European policy on subnational administrations and resources to the attention of other European policy-makers in other institutions (Carroll, 2011).

Although the Committee of the Regions undoubtedly provides an arena for minority nationalist parties to express their concerns and share their aims and proposals, it is still clear however that, in defending the overall interests of subnational authorities, the CoR cannot focus specifically on the cultural and constitutional aims of most minority nationalist parties. With domestic electoral success being a prerequisite for any significant representation within the CoR, its design tends to replicate and amplify the minority position within which minority nationalist parties find themselves at the domestic level. As an arena to secure legitimacy for their demands, the CoR similarly fails from the perspective of these parties insofar as its

influence on the European-level policy process is limited. The reduction of own-initiative opinions also means the likelihood of having minority nationalist concerns emerge as part of policy recommendations or policy reports from the CoR appears remote at best.

Political unification and central penetration of national systems of governance.

Europeanisation as a process of political unification of Europe is, from the perspective of minority nationalist parties, faced with the same limitations and severe constraints as participation within the European-level institutions that form the building blocks of a potential, politically unified European Union.

While generally supportive of the European Union in principle, minority nationalist parties have grown increasingly sceptical of the direction taken in recent years of European construction (Hepburn, 2008; Keating, 2008a). Current stances on the European Union from minority nationalist parties in Scotland, Catalonia and Corsica range from cautious but strong support from the SNP arguing in favour of many aspects of European policy such as freedom of movement or European funding, while admitting the need for further reform and opposing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) (Scottish National Party, 2016d, 2016a), to the indifference and moderate critiques found within both Corsican and Catalan minority nationalist parties. Throughout the data collection conducted for this study, the European Union was virtually absent from the rhetoric of Catalan minority nationalist parties, with the exception of discussions around the role of the European Union in hindering (or validating) a potential independence process (Martínez, 2015; Nardelli and Arnett, 2015). Similarly, European Union politics played little role in Corsican nationalist rhetoric, with the European Union very much reduced to occasional questions of regional funding and economic support.

With limited institutional participation prospects and continued indifference or dissatisfaction with more or less broad aspects of European Union policy, it seems unlikely that minority nationalist parties will be able to contribute significantly to Europeanisation understood as the political unification of Europe, and any satisfactory outcome (from the perspective of minority nationalist parties) would rely heavily on stronger, more influential political parties and national government leaders who might or might not share the aims and objectives of minority nationalist parties. With constraints on participation and no immediate prospect of a continent-wide convergence around minority nationalist ideas, it is likely that

minority nationalist parties will continue to be indifferent to a form of Europeanisation they can do little to influence in the short term.

The question of the impact of European Union policy and practice on national (and subnational) governance has been central to the multi-level governance research agenda as well as many empirical studies on the impact of regional policy in various European countries (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Czernielewska, Paraskevopoulos and Szlachta, 2004; Dąbrowski, 2012; Adshead, 2014). While studies highlight the uneven and often case-specific impact of European policy on national and subnational practices, Olsen highlights two key ways in which Europeanisation acts in this context: through competitive adaptation, and through experiential learning (Olsen, 2002). While competitive adaptation is relevant, particularly in the context of subnational authorities adopting best practices in order to secure competitive structural funds and other grants (Dąbrowski, 2012), experiential learning is particularly important in the context of minority nationalist parties in Europe. Both the interview process and the data collected for this thesis revealed a clear concern by minority nationalist parties for developments in other territories with similar political parties and similar political divisions and debates. All minority nationalist political figures interviewed emphasised ties with other similar parties in Europe, ranging from formal ties through institutions such as the EFA to more informal ties built on regular interactions and exchanges, such as the participation of Corsican nationalists as observers for the unofficial independence referendum held by Catalan minority nationalists in 2014 highlighted by Corsican Assembly President Jean-Guy Talamoni in an interview. Further informal ties, such as the presence of ‘international delegations’ at nationalist protests, were also observed during a protest organised by a nationalist civil society group in Corsica in September 2016, and continue to be a feature of many minority nationalist public protests across Europe.

These ties, which are located primarily outside of any formal institutional setting, allow for significant opportunities in terms of experiential learning. Evidence of such learning was rife throughout the electoral campaign leading up to the territorial (subnational) elections to the Corsican Assembly in 2015, where both moderate and radical Corsican nationalists highlighted the importance of political unity at elections, pointing to the recent example of electoral success gained by a coalition of nationalist parties in Catalonia in September 2015 (Alfonsi, 2015; Mari, 2015). Similarly, Catalan nationalist parties drew heavily on the example

of the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 to both formulate their demands for a similar vote in Catalonia and undermine the legitimacy of Spanish governmental opposition to the demand (Esquerra Republicana, 2015g).

As we have seen in the above sections, the different approaches to Europeanisation highlighted by Olsen vary in their relevance and in the extent to which minority nationalist parties engage with them. While engagement with European-level institutions remains relevant for minority nationalist parties, significant restrictions on access to policy making and continued reservations on the current political direction of the European Union mean that, broadly speaking, minority nationalist parties in Scotland, Catalonia and Corsica are unable to yield significant influence at the European level. This, however, does not limit minority nationalist parties to domestic politics – minority nationalist parties continue to adopt a distinctly European outlook, showing concern for the success and failures of similar parties in other European territories and building wide ranging bilateral and multilateral ties both within and outside formal European-level institutions, leading to experiential learning and a degree of convergence between the rhetoric and strategies of minority nationalist parties in these territories.

A closer look at (and a slight modification of) the final form of Europeanisation suggested by Olsen, the exportation of European forms of political organisation, will allow us to highlight ways in which minority nationalist parties draw upon European and sometimes global principles and treaties to influence the political organisation of both their territories and the states within which they are located.

Exporting European norms to Europe: European principles challenging national policies.

Olsen, describing this form of Europeanisation as the ‘spread of European forms of political organisation beyond the European territory’ (Olsen, 2002), describes what has been broadly conceptualised as the notion of ‘soft power Europe’, in which Europe is seen as an important normative promoter not only within its own immediate neighbourhood but globally (Delanty and Rumford, 2005; Gstöhl, 2015). Minority nationalist parties within Europe however still draw upon European-level documents, principles and charters to challenge and

sometimes successfully change the policy stances of national governments on issues such as recognition and, where relevant, minority language rights and promotion. In that respect, minority nationalist parties are engaged in a process of ‘exportation’ of European-level norms to European countries themselves, challenging the legitimacy of established national state practices and drawing upon principles enshrined at the European level to push issues they see as key up the agenda within their respective national states.

To analyse this, the example of the ECRML will be used. The ECRML is a European-level charter providing a framework for the protection and promotion of minority and regional languages to be adopted and adapted by each signatory state (Committee of the Regions, 2017a). The charter, which does not provide an official recognition for minorities as a group, instead provides a platform for the recognition, protection and promotion of regional language use within the territories where a given language is traditionally spoken (Locatelli, 2002).

The Charter was established in 1992 and entered into force following ratification by five Council of Europe member states in 1998 (Keating, 2004)(Committee of the Regions, 2017b). At the time of writing, 28 countries have signed and ratified the Charter (including the United Kingdom and Spain), while 8 countries have signed but not ratified the Charter (including France). This highlights what can be seen as the first weakness in the ECRML framework. While countries that sign and ratify the charter do fall under the remit of a three-year continuous monitoring process, whereby the Council of Europe produces reports assessing the state of minority language rights in a given country, there is very little forcing countries to sign and ratify the charter in the first place. While ratification of the Charter is repeatedly discussed and attempted within France, continued opposition from all sides of the political spectrum as well as concerns over compatibility with the French constitution have prevented the ratification, and therefore implementation, of the charter in France. (Blanchet, 2002; Locatelli, 2002; Giordan, 2008) (Rédaction France Info, 2015).

The format of the Charter itself, built as a framework with many possible degrees of implementation and many different optional measures, provides an opportunity for a variety of regional language protections ranging from extensive to limited. Signatory countries for instance need only implement thirty-five paragraphs within Part III of the Charter, which covers up to sixty-four concrete policy measures to protect regional languages (Kraus and Kazlauskaitė-Gürbüz, 2014). This, in addition to ratification and enforcement limitations, has

led to some observers describing the Charter as having little impact on the further recognition and protection of minority languages in Europe (Elias, 2008b).

Despite these issues however, the Charter provides an important starting point for minority nationalist parties arguing for further recognition and protection for their respective ‘regional’ languages. While many minority nationalists and others, including French Member of Parliament and long-time activist in favour of regional and cultural autonomy for Brittany Paul Molac, see the Charter as insufficient, support for its core ideas and for its implementation remains high (Olivesi, 1998). The Charter, through its very existence as a document setting out principles and policies states are encouraged to ratify and implement, provides minority nationalist parties with a reference point to legitimise linguistic demands and delegitimise government opposition to these demands.

Drawing upon the terminology of Onuf’s constructivism further clarifies this point. Assuming the existence of a broadly accepted rule, which could be stated as ‘international agreements are relevant, and matters in political decision-making’, a further rule can be stated saying that the ‘institution’ (understood as a set of rules and practices) (Onuf *et al.*, 2013) of international agreements, and the rules that this creates, are relevant factors in the behaviour and decision making of individual and collective political agents (if not legally, then ethically or ‘morally’). Assuming this rule holds broadly across political actors within Europe at the very least, the existence of the ECRML provides an important tool for minority nationalist parties to promote some of their key demands in terms of cultural and linguistic recognition and protection. By providing alternative rules, or ‘statements that tell people what we should do’ (Onuf *et al.*, 2013, p. 4), at the European level that states *should* ratify and implement, documents such as the ECRML significantly challenge the legitimacy of alternative approaches to minority languages at the national and subnational level.

This does not necessarily lead to a change in the condition of rule, understood as the condition whereby some actors are perceived as more legitimate than others to enforce and shape rules (Onuf, 1989; Onuf *et al.*, 2013). States, as we have seen above and as the signatories of the Charter, still enjoy a degree of flexibility in the implementation of the Charter, and can, as in the case of France, simply not implement the Charter within their national legal systems. The existence of the Charter however, and its implementation by twenty-eight European countries, does however increasingly undermine the legitimacy of states refusing to implement

it. Minority nationalists and other observers of the Charter in France frequently point to the ratification of the Charter by other European countries to criticise France's inability to do the same (Giordan, 2008). In interviews, France's stance on minority languages was often characterised as 'backward' by minority nationalist actors, and was frequently compared negatively with neighbouring countries. While this, in itself, does not force any policy changes, the ECRML and the European-level rules it promotes act as powerful legitimising influences that minority nationalist parties can draw upon to secure public support for some of their demands.

The example of the ECRML is particularly important to highlight and understand the potential impact of minority nationalist party actions and rhetoric on the political environment in which they operate, and by extension on the opportunities these parties have to achieve their aims. While there are no legal obligations to ratify and sign the ECRML, and only limited enforcement powers once the Charter has been signed, the adoption of the Charter by some European countries places pressures on countries who have yet to ratify the document. Minority nationalist parties are able, on the grounds of what *should* be done, to push for changes within their own territory based on the 'ethical' (as opposed to legal) precedent set by other countries in the same European political space. This precedent, although it does not oblige states to adopt certain policies, allows minority nationalist parties to challenge established rules by drawing upon alternative rules that have been implemented or accepted in other states – states which are perceived as similar and relevant due to their presence within a shared European political space.

It is crucial, however, not to reduce this phenomenon to formal charters and documents established at the European-level through institutions such as the European Union or the Council of Europe. Drawing on the broader understandings of Europeanisation described at the beginning of this chapter, I also argue that Europeanisation, understood as the emergence of a European polity (as per Delanty and Rumford, 2005) and as the emergence of new, cross-national policy networks and shifts in cognition, discourse and identity (as per Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003), provides a broader basis on which to understand the 'Europeanisation' of minority nationalism and how minority nationalist parties take advantage and draw upon the idea of a European polity to further their own domestic aims.

Minority nationalists and Europe

While, as we have seen, European-level institutions do appear to be a fruitful arena for the creation, legitimation and diffusion of alternative norms, the question still remains as to what extent Europe forms a crucial part of minority nationalist party rhetoric, and to what extent minority nationalist parties share a clear commitment to Europe, simply perceive Europe as a utilitarian resource in their domestic political struggle, or see European-level institutions as another critical agent in the process of diffusing norms on self-determination.

The literature focusing on the relationship between minority nationalist parties, as individual parties, and the European Union, is relatively small. While a common assumption made in the literature is that minority nationalist parties are broadly supportive of the European Union and its institutions, many studies also highlight that characterising minority nationalist parties as being exclusively supportive mischaracterises the ‘complexity of the diverse ways in which they react European integration’. (Elias, 2008a, p. 576). Many other studies highlight different broad stages of minority nationalist support of the European Union. In a study of three minority nationalist parties in Scotland, Sardinia and Bavaria, Hepburn identifies three major stages: nationalist or left-wing scepticism until 1990, followed the emergence of a consensus over the positive nature of the Europe of Regions project, followed by disillusionment with the progress made by the idea and reversal back to a state-centric focus and strategies. (Hepburn, 2008). Keating, in his assessment of the Europe of Regions project, also agreed that the project had fallen far short of minority nationalist expectations, depriving them of a direct relationship with the European Union or of many other tools that may have helped them in the pursuit of their goals (Keating, 2008a). Similarly, Elias identifies four different possible stances adopted by minority nationalism: euro-enthusiasm, euro-rejects, euro-scepticism, and euro-pragmatism (Elias, 2008a). According to this framework, parties are either fully supportive (euro-enthusiasts), opposed and strongly critical (euro-rejects), committed to the principle of Europe but dissatisfied with current developments (euro-sceptics) or supportive of the EU on purely pragmatic grounds (euro-pragmatists). This is echoed in Elias’ book on minority nationalist party attitudes to Europe, which analyses that minority nationalist party opinions of Europe vary both across cases and across time significantly (Elias, 2008b).

Before analysing the extent to which Europe or the European Union played a part in minority nationalist party rhetoric in the three cases and during the time period analysed here, a brief overview of each case's historical trajectory is necessary.

As we have said above, like many minority nationalist parties, the SNP's relationship with Europe has evolved and changed significantly over time. Initially, the SNP remained quite critical and sceptical of the European Union in the period surrounding the United Kingdom's entry in 1973. While initial concerns focused on the European Communities' as a centralist and elitist organisation within which Scotland would have no voice, the late 1980s saw a shift in stance from this initial scepticism to a broad support for the notion of independence within Europe, which understood Europe as a framework for self-determination (Hepburn, 2006; Hepburn and Elias, 2011). Even as disillusionment grew surrounding the concept of Europe of Regions, the SNP remained committed to independence within Europe as a primary policy goal (Keating, 2008a).

The analysis conducted for this thesis did capture a substantial amount of EU-related rhetoric by the SNP, although this needs to come with a number of important points. First and foremost, there is little to indicate, even today, that the SNP has shifted away from the 'euro-enthusiast' position it gradually adopted in the late 1980s and 1990s. Secondly however, the extent to which the SNP discusses Europe in its rhetoric, rather than evidence of its support, was skewed significantly by the centrality of the United Kingdom's departure from the EU in public opinion and public discourse. While the SNP's opinion of the European Union in rhetoric is almost exclusively positive, and although this echoes with previous studies showing SNP support for the European Union, the impact of a significant external crisis in the shape of Britain's departure from the European Union had a non-negligible impact on SNP rhetoric on Europe.

There were two broad 'periods' with regard to SNP rhetoric on the European Union in the data analysed for this thesis. The first period, which pre-dates the European Union referendum in June 2016, focuses primarily on SNP opposition to UK central government plans to hold a referendum on EU membership. SNP rhetoric at that period is also unequivocally in favour of Scottish membership of the European Union: Fiona Hyslop for instance, criticised the EU referendum Bill put forward by the UK government, arguing that a 'double majority' system should be in place, through which only a majority vote in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom could be considered legitimate (STV, 2015), in effect putting forward a

‘peopleness’ argument that Scotland’s people should be distinguished from the rest of the United Kingdom as a fully ‘self-enclosed’ demos with its own democratic rights. The SNP also re-stated its commitment, numerous times, to campaign for Scottish membership of the European Union (Scottish National Party, 2015r; Sky News, 2015), arguing that not only there was a probably democratic majority in favour of European Union membership (Scottish National Party, 2015a), but also EU membership was vital to Scotland as a country. Drawing on this notion of Scottish ‘peopleness’ and its existence as a distinct democratic demos, SNP MEP Alyn Smith went slightly further, arguing that a vote for leaving the European Union, most notably if this was against the will of the majority in Scotland, would legitimise independence as a political solution to Scotland’s desire to stay within the European Union (Appendix A interview 7, Barbiere, 2015).

Scotland’s position on the European Union only marginally shifted following the 2016 EU referendum in the UK. Highlighting that Scotland would be taken out of the European Union ‘against its will’, Nicola Sturgeon argued, echoing Alyn Smith, that a second independence referendum was ‘highly likely’ as a result of the UK’s decision to leave the European Union (Carrell and Brooks, 2016). Despite this initial reaction however, SNP rhetoric quickly shifted slightly towards pursuing continued Single Market membership within the UK, without which independence would become a legitimate option. The SNP 2017 General Election Manifesto for instance makes multiple mentions of Europe across a wide range of subject areas, highlighting the importance of cooperation, single market membership and European environmental policy (Scottish National Party, 2017). Similarly, the SNP’s own policy statement on the European Union emphasises the necessity to stay a member of the Single Market, without which employment and wages would drop significantly (Scottish National Party, 2016c).

Of the three cases analysed here, the SNP can most likely be described as ‘euro-enthusiast’. In opposing the UK’s departure from the European Union prior to the referendum and in opposing Scotland’s own departure following the referendum, the SNP adopted a strongly pro-European Union rhetoric, highlighting the benefits of European Union membership for Scotland and the potential damage caused by a departure. Coupled with a ‘peopleness’ argument positing the Scottish people as a distinct ‘demos’ with its own right to majority democratic decision making, the SNP in effect continued to argue for ‘independence in Europe’, by arguing that departure from the European Union and the Single Market without the approval of the Scottish people would be considered a legitimate reason to pursue

independence again. In many respects therefore, the SNP's stance on Europe is not only consistent with existing studies, but also remarkably stable across time.

Unlike the SNP, both major minority nationalist parties in Catalonia have traditionally held relatively supportive views of the European integration process and the European Union, at the very least in principle. The CiU, rooted in a tradition of anti-Francoism that saw Europe as a bulwark against dictatorship (Giordano and Roller, 2002), looked to the European Union as a legitimising factor for its own nationhood. There are two major elements related to the CiU's traditional stance on European integration: the idea that Europe, with its multilateral decision-making, contrasts significantly with the Spanish state and provides a much stronger avenue for autonomy, decision-making and the fulfilment of Catalonia's national aspiration (Ehrlich, 1997; Giordano and Roller, 2002). Secondly, that European integration is perceived as a significant step towards modernisation, which justified a strong commitment for Catalonia to 'enter the European mainstream' (Ehrlich, 1997).

Alternatively, the ERC's stance towards Europe appears closer to that espoused by other minority nationalist parties and can be understood to broadly follow the pattern described by Hepburn above. After espousing the notion of a Europe of Regions for the better part of the 1990s and early 2000s, the ERC's stance shifted subtly towards the notion of a 'Europe of Peoples', which would grant further rights to national groups as opposed to sub-national authorities per se (Giordano and Roller, 2002). More recently, with growing disillusionment regarding the realisation of a Europe of Regions or a Europe of People's the ERC has adopted a stance that can be characterised as 'euro-scepticism' as described above: a continued commitment to European integration, but a growing scepticism of the extent to which European integration is serving the interests of minority stateless peoples as opposed to serving the interests of member states (Giordano and Roller, 2002).

Although the few previous studies on Catalan minority nationalist attitudes towards Europe to lean towards a characterisation of Catalan nationalism as either euro-enthusiast or mildly 'euro-sceptic', the data analysed in this study points to a position with regard to Europe that is very firmly 'euro-pragmatic'. There are two major periods during which Europe appears in the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties in Catalonia: the run-up to the October 2015 parliamentary election, where scrutiny over Catalonia's continued European Union membership after independence brought the subject the forefront of debates, and October 2017,

where Europe's reaction to the Catalan referendum crisis triggered a brief wave of discontent against the European institutions.

In the run up to the 2015 elections, the notion that Catalan independence would lead to the nation taking its 'rightful' place as a European state alongside all the other European states is still very present in discourse, echoing the historical focus of the CiU on European integration as a legitimising factor for Catalan nationhood. Several major minority nationalist parties reiterated the idea that Catalan independence would lead to Catalonia becoming a new 'European country' or a new country 'in Europe'. For instance, Raul Romeva described the Junts Pel Si manifesto for the October 2015 election to be a 'manifesto that enables to begin the journey towards normality, to a normality deserving of a European state' (Esquerra Republicana, 2015a). Junts Pel Si described its own manifesto as 'guaranteeing the transition towards becoming a new European state' (Junts Pel Sí, 2015l), and other minority nationalist leaders such as then-Catalan President Artur Mas described the population of Catalonia as 'European citizens' (Junts Pel Sí, 2015h).

However, the vast majority of mentions of Europe in the campaign for the October 2015 Catalan parliamentary elections were related to Catalonia subsequent membership of the European Union following a hypothetical independence. Different minority nationalist leaders adopted different stances to justify Catalonia's continued membership after independence. Representatives such as Raul Romeva highlighted in various Twitter messages at various times during the campaign that Europe would inevitably accept a democratic mandate in favour of independence, and would negotiate (Junts Pel Sí, 2015g, 2015a; Romeva i Rueda, 2015a). The view was echoed by other leading minority nationalists, such as Oriol Amat, who argued that should the democratic mandate for independence be clear, independence would be inevitable and Europe would have no choice but to negotiate (Junts Pel Sí, 2015e). Other minority nationalists also highlighted repeatedly that Europe would accept Catalan membership of the European Union, but drew on different arguments. Carme Forcadell argued that Europe is 'pragmatic, and the most practical option is that Catalonia should continue as European member state' (Junts Pel Sí, 2015b). Others, such as Artur Mas, echoed that sentiment, arguing that Europe is pragmatic and would not expel Catalonia and its European citizens (Junts Pel Sí, 2015h). Finally, other leaders such as Oriol Junqueras put forward a legalistic argument, arguing that no treaty or directive existed that could result in Catalonia being expelled from the European Union in the event of independence (Esquerra Republicana, 2015f), while the CDC

argued online that the European Union would want an ‘innovative, open state committed to the welfare state’ (Convergents - CDC, 2015g).

The very wide range of arguments put forward in favour of continued European Union membership by Catalan minority nationalists in the campaign prior to the October 2015 election all share a common element: unlike the SNP’s 2015 and 2016 rhetoric, none of the arguments put forward highlight the benefits of European Union membership for Catalonia, and focus instead on the possibility of remaining a member after independence. While the data gathered is not sufficient to provide a definitive answer as to why, two potential interpretations can be offered. First and foremost, many of the responses put forward by Catalan nationalists were in response to opponents using the loss of European Union membership as an argument against independence, which led minority nationalists to argue not about the benefits of European Union membership, but their potential right to remain a member. Secondly, it is clear from the otherwise marginal role played by Europe in the rhetoric of Catalan minority nationalists during the campaign and, even more strikingly, outside of the campaign, that Catalan minority nationalists had adopted a very strong ‘euro-pragmatic’ stance, using the European Union as a legitimising tool for the primary goal of self-determination.

The ‘euro-pragmatic’ stance adopted by minority nationalists in Catalonia becomes increasingly supported when one considers the second period during which Europe re-emerged, albeit briefly, as part of Catalan nationalist rhetoric. Following the independence referendum crisis in 2017 and the rejection by the European Union of Catalan nationalist demands and norms (Reuters, 2017), there was a brief, albeit strong reaction against the European Union from Catalan minority nationalists, with the most notable and violent example being now-former President Carles Puigdemont. In the aftermath of the Catalan referendum crisis, Carles Puigdemont criticized the European Union violently, accusing of ‘collaborating’ with ‘Spanish fascism’ by legitimising the ‘coup’ carried out by the Spanish state against Catalan sub-national institutions (Suanzes, 2017). Puigdemont followed on, suggesting that a referendum on Catalan membership of the European Union may be an option (Rico and Julve, 2017). In the face of growing criticism from other minority nationalist figures, Puigdemont retracted some of his criticism and reiterated that ‘Catalanism was undoubtedly pro-European’, asking for the establishment of a ‘more democratic’ Europe in which ‘people have more power and states less’ (OkDiario, 2017). Although critical of Puigdemont’s stance, the ERC’s stance on the European Union appeared significantly less enthusiastic, with representatives putting forward the view that the European Union ‘needed to be changed’, albeit it rejected the idea of leaving

it as a fruitful solution (El Periódico, 2017). As we can see here, if euro-pragmatists support Europe only insofar as it serves or legitimises another purpose, it is perhaps unsurprising that Catalan nationalists adopted a less enthusiastic approach to Europe in their rhetoric following the Catalan independence referendum crisis, in which they held the European Union at least partly complicit.

The case of Corsica provides us with a third, different approach to Europe. While the SNP enthusiastically defended Europe in the context of its pursuit of ‘independence in Europe’ and in response to the UK’s decision to leave the European Union, and the Catalans engaged strongly with Europe as pragmatic tool to forward their pursuit of nationhood, Corsican nationalists did not address Europe in their day-to-day rhetoric during the period analysed. Only a few comments on Europe were recorded.

Historically, the divisions between Corsican radicals and Corsican moderates within the nationalist movement are also reflected in the different sides’ stances on Europe and European Integration. In the few studies analysing Corsican nationalist opinions on Europe, Corsican moderates (represented today by Femu a Corsica) are described as being traditionally favourable to the European Union. Moderate Corsican nationalists understand that, by virtue of its insular nature, Corsica requires integration with Europe, and Europe provides a strong platform for the promotion of ideas through links with other, like-minded political parties within Europe (Hepburn and Elias, 2011). Moderate Corsican nationalists, who remained ‘remarkably constant’ in their support for European integration according to Elias, supported the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and the 2005 European Constitutional Treaty enthusiastically (Elias, 2008b, p. 137; Hepburn and Elias, 2011).

Contrarily to Corsican moderates, radical minority nationalists have often maintained a more sceptical position of the European Union. While the FLNC rejected European integration wholesale, later political embodiments of the Corsican radical nationalists maintained a mild support for the European Union, notably insofar as it was perceived as a provider of resources for the island (Hepburn and Elias, 2011). This ‘clientelist’ approach to European integration, in which party interest in the European Union is limited to the resources it can provide to the island, is described as one of the reasons why Corsican radical nationalists continue to take only a marginal interest in European integration and European politics (Elias, 2008b, p. 138).

The lack of a European election within the period studied, and the virtual absence of any Europe-related rhetoric during that period, confirms some well established findings in the existing literature. Hepburn and Elias in 2011 explain that references to European integration are confined to European elections, and Elias in 2008 also describes European issues as ‘marginal’ in the day-to-day political rhetoric of Corsican minority nationalism, confirming findings from a previous study on the salience of European issues in Corsica conducted fifteen years earlier (Elias, 2008b; Hepburn and Elias, 2011).

In addition to the explanations regarding the marginality of European issues within Corsican nationalism, the framework of this thesis allows us to put forward an additional hypothesis that could form the basis of a future body of research. As we analysed in chapter 3, Corsican nationalism is continuing to focus primarily on the achievement of ‘peopleness’, securing recognition as a distinct identity with France with political rights. As we saw however, the critical agents for the diffusion and adoption of such a norm are the local electorate, central government and, indirectly, the state-wide electorate. In this context, Corsican nationalists, regardless of fundamental ideological positioning on European integration, appear to have very little to gain right now in the pursuit of a strong, European policy. While this is particularly helpful for Scotland and Catalonia in their attempts to establish their nationhood as legitimate in the eyes of the broader international community, there appears to be little need for Corsican nationalists to address Europe either way, except in a context where Europe provides resources that are useful for domestic policy-making. It is important to note that this hypothesis need not clash with pre-existing understandings of the reasons behind low European salience in Corsican nationalism; in many respects, the hypothesis developed above and rooted in norm diffusion can be understood as reinforcing other elements of context that lead to low European salience in Corsican nationalism.

Aside from the stance of minority nationalist parties on Europe itself, we also analysed previously that Europe as a political space is becoming increasingly relevant. Do minority nationalists use that political space to develop common ground and common identities? While less frequent in public party communication and rhetoric, the idea of a shared identity between minority nationalists in various territories is a recurring, yet uneven theme in the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties. During interviews conducted in Corsica, both Gilles Simeoni and Jean-Guy Talamoni, representing the two branches of Corsican nationalism (moderate and

radical, respectively), frequently referred to transnational interactions between minority nationalist parties (Appendix A, interviews 2 and 3). Referring to Corsican nationalism's new-found status as a governing force following electoral success in December 2015, Simeoni remarked that Corsican nationalists 'frequently travelled to other territories and regions to learn', while today Corsican nationalism is 'seen, when delegations from other regions and other minority nationalist parties are welcomed to Corsica, as leading model in Europe'. One of the very few mentions of Europe by Corsican minority nationalists during the period analysed was by Corsican radical youth group *Ghjuventu Indipendentista*, that described a particularly fruitful journey to Brussels where representatives of the group were able to meet with several European officials and representatives from other minority nationalist parties (Cusenza, 2015). As in the case of Catalonia, the group primarily uses the openness of European-level officials and other minority nationalist parties in contrast to the perceived unwillingness by the French government to engage in any meaningful dialogue. Similarly, David Grosclaude, vice-President of the European Free Alliance and veteran activist for linguistic and regional rights for Occitania (a historical region covering much of Southern France), highlighted the important role of strong, established minority nationalist parties in the Spanish Basque Country or Catalonia as models to shape and illustrate the demands of weaker counterparts in France and across Europe (Appendix A, interview 6).

Similarly, in Catalonia, minority nationalist parties often look towards Scotland as an example to follow, drawing upon the legitimacy of the SNP's case to argue for the legitimacy of their own. In several cases, Spain's intransigence was contrasted with what was presented as an open and democratic spirit in the United Kingdom (Esquerra Republicana, 2015h). This was echoed in the interview of Ramon Tremosa, who explained that if Scotland decides to pursue independence unilaterally, this would be 'very good' for Catalan nationalists as their circumstances are so similar (Appendix A, interview 8). While I have encountered little evidence that this transnational link goes beyond social and inspirational ties and the legitimising of their own demands by shaming the Spanish government, it is clear from this example and from the example of Corsica that minority nationalists do 'look outwards' to draw inspiration from, learn and use the experiences of other minority nationalist parties in Europe in similar situations.

While widespread, the central role played by transnational ‘learning’ and the development of shared beliefs and norms among minority nationalist parties is not equally spread across all parties in all territories in Europe and is not unlimited. In an interview with Christian Allard, former Member of the Scottish Parliament until 2015, very little mention was made of other minority nationalist parties in other territories, with Mr. Allard going as far as emphasising the importance of ‘non-interference’ in other states’ affairs with regards to the regional, cultural and linguistic policies implemented by other states in other territories with minority nationalist claims (Appendix A, interview 5). This reluctance to comment on the political situation of other regions and other minority nationalist parties in Europe, echoes the relative absence of any significant mention of other minority nationalist parties in the public rhetoric of the SNP more broadly. Similarly in Corsica, while social and ‘ideological’ ties with other minority nationalist parties are frequent, there is a pronounced reluctance, expressed by Gilles Simeoni in my interview, to draw direct lessons for their own case from other situations around Europe (Appendix A, interview 2).

However, despite the uneven presence of notions of shared beliefs, interests and identity within minority nationalist discourse, and an uneven and sometimes low willingness to engage too comprehensively in transnational actions and discussions, the emergence of shared beliefs alongside a sense of ‘common identity’ illustrated by formal institutions such as the EFA and by bilateral or multilateral informal interactions between minority nationalist parties provides, similarly to the precedent described above set by formal documents and charters, an arena in which minority nationalist parties can learn from each other’s experiences, develop shared norms, practices and beliefs, and use them to challenge or reinforce established rules, norms, beliefs and practices at both the European and national levels. While these practices are infrequently referred to in public rhetoric and do not form a significant part of the identity of the larger minority nationalist parties studied here, these represent an opportunity for norm alignment between similar parties in similar political situations. Again, rather than providing them with strict legal or institutional power to enforce demands, the existence of such an arena allows them to challenge rules understood as what can legitimately be done by whom. This is most explicitly seen in the minority nationalist pursuit of institutional changes providing greater autonomy, or even independence, to their respective territories. As highlighted above, while this alone does not alter the ‘condition of rule’ in which these parties operate, it does provide an alternative framework through which minority nationalist parties can legitimise

their demands, not only by presenting charters or legal principles other states might have signed as the policies and principles that *should* be implemented within their own state, but also by emphasising political practices in other neighbouring or similar states and delegitimising opposition to similar practices in their own state (the notion of self-determination referenda or regional autonomy are two strong examples of this).

Conclusion

Minority nationalist parties, despite their local or subnational focus, are influenced by European-level politics. Their formal participation in European Union politics is problematic and limited by a number of factors including limited access to policy-making arenas and the difficulties faced by minority nationalist parties in developing a strong, coherent representation at the European level. Such difficulties, and the limitations placed on minority nationalist party action at the European level by the Union's current institutional set up, have led academics to describe minority nationalist parties as disillusioned, indifferent, or even critical of the European Union, preferring a renewed focus on domestic politics to pursue and achieve their political aims.

While these limitations are clearly significant, as has been highlighted by the 2017 Catalan crisis, minority nationalist parties need not abandon Europe as a politically relevant space altogether. While the formal institutions of the European Union remain broadly out of reach for these parties, they continue to perceive Europe as a relevant political space to challenge the rules and policies they oppose, most notably in terms of linguistic or constitutional policies. The density of European-level institutions, the partial (and fragile) political unification of Europe and the influence of European-level practices on national and subnational governance contribute to creating a European political space where principles and policies are discussed, challenged, and alternatives to established political arrangements are established and legitimised. In this chapter, we analysed the particular example of the ECRML. Although a 'legal' text in name, there is little in the way of enforcement, and no way to coerce members into ratifying the Charter in the first place. The ECRML, in that respect, represents a set of principles, of rules governing the use, protection and promotion of minority and regional languages within Europe, a set of rules whose challenge to established policies at the national level, rather than legal, remains fundamentally political and discursive.

Minority nationalist parties have drawn upon the ECRML, and its growing adoption by European countries, as an argument to delegitimise opposition to the Charter's policies within national states, most notably France. Regional languages and the ECRML are not the only domain in which minority nationalist parties invoke the example or the 'ethical precedent' set by European countries as an argument to legitimise their own demands: similar attempts have been made around constitutional demands, most notably demands for independence referenda, and demands for durable political settlements following periods of minority nationalist political violence.

Despite the existence of Europe as a potential political space, minority nationalist parties have, for the most part exhibited a remarkable stability in their stance towards European integration. In our analysis, the SNP has shown no signs of shifting away from the pro-European desire for 'independence within Europe' that it embraced in the 1990s, and Corsican nationalists appear to be as indifferent to Europe as ever. Finally, Catalan minority nationalists, whose traditional stance on Europe can be understood as 'euro-pragmatic', have continued to embrace that approach, supporting European integration for the best part of the period analysed here but shifting towards more sceptical positions in response to Europe's rejection of their demands in 2017.

Conclusion

The behaviour of political agents is rule-driven, and minority nationalist parties are no different in this respect. Unlike many other parties however, the normative preferences of minority nationalist parties frequently clash with the fundamental institutional, legal and constitutional framework of the state or states in which they operate. Even when these parties accede to positions of power within that framework, the ‘fit’ is often imperfect and the relationship with the central government often marked by tensions and disagreements.

The first question this thesis sought to address was the question of principles driving minority nationalist party action and rhetoric. In the third chapter, I determined that self-determination could be understood as the fundamental principle underpinning most, if not all, minority nationalist rhetoric and action in all three of our cases. Understood as a right applicable to ‘peoples’, minority nationalist parties most frequently attempt to establish, and diffuse, norms legitimising the population of their territory as a distinct ‘people’ deserving of recognition and able to exercise the right to self-determination. With peopleness understood as a pre-requisite for the exercise of self-determination, minority nationalist parties in all three cases were understood to be at different stages in a normative chain, in which a series of norms build on each other to legitimise the exercise of self-determination for a given people within a given territory.

Of all three cases, Corsican minority nationalists were the only case in which the very ‘peopleness’ of Corsicans was not accepted by all critical agents within their domestic sphere. While Corsican nationalists were broadly able to promote, through several decades of political and cultural activism, a distinct notion of Corsican identity which they have then politicised, Corsican ‘peopleness’ remains unrecognised and does not benefit from any institutional recognition, whether at the local or state level in France.

Consequently, identity-based grievances play a central role in Corsican nationalist rhetoric. With ‘peopleness’ at stake, Corsican nationalists focus significantly on establishing, and defending, a distinct identity which deserves access to self-determination.

In both other cases, in Catalonia and Scotland, ‘peopleness’ is not at stake, at the very least not in the way it is in Corsica. Both Scots and Catalans are institutionally recognised as a distinct ‘people’, with their own identity, languages and extensive sub-national political autonomy to govern themselves on a wide range of issues. As a result, both Catalan and Scottish

people focus directly on grievances related to what they perceive as insufficient self-determination.

In Catalonia however, while ‘peopleness’ itself is not particularly challenged by the Spanish state, the right to self-determination is. From the perspective of the Spanish state, distinct ‘peopleness’ does not, inevitably, lead to an ever-extensible right to political sovereignty and self-determination. As a result, much of the rhetoric of minority nationalist parties and the tensions between these parties in government and the central Spanish government focus on institutional grievances. With the extent of internal self-determination granted to Catalonia falling short of minority nationalist party normative demands, and with little prospect of the Spanish state accepting internal self-determination along the lines desired by these parties, the debate for them has shifted towards external self-determination, or independence, as the preferred option. This demand for independence, which is it at the root of most tensions witnessed in Catalonia during the period of this study, is an excellent illustration of how self-determination drives minority nationalist parties: with self-determination being the fundamental aim, these parties attempt to secure it within the boundary of the state in which they find themselves and, failing this, attempt to secure it outside of those boundaries.

Of all three cases, the Scottish case is the one in which self-determination is least problematic. It is the only case studied here in which the notion of self-determination as a result of Scottish ‘peopleness’ is accepted by most, if not all, critical agents within the British domestic political sphere. Building on democratic legitimacy, the SNP were able to pursue external self-determination in a British government-supported referendum, held in 2014. Following the failure of this referendum, the SNP have campaigned continuously for the extension of internal self-determination, drawing primarily upon economic grievances to justify further institutional changes in favour of greater autonomy for the devolved authorities in Scotland. As a result of the EU membership referendum in 2016 however, the SNP has reverted to demanding external self-determination, this time with no support from the British government. These recent developments have, in a similar way to Catalonia, brought back institutional grievances to the forefront of SNP rhetoric.

In analysing the main minority nationalist grievances through a constructivist and norm diffusion lens, this thesis contributes in several important ways to the existing literature. The notion that self-determination is a ‘touchstone’, or an important ideological factor upon which minority nationalist parties base their policy decisions, is confirmed here. Similarly, the idea

that minority nationalist parties will operate on a two-dimension political scale, with territorial politics and traditional economic politics co-existing, is also reinforced, although this thesis would argue that traditional economic politics are often subsumed and completely subservient to the self-determination-driven territorial politics. Finally, this thesis allows us to conceptualise the centrality of self-determination without undermining findings in the literature which state that parties frequently frame issues in different ways, or emphasise issues in different ways, for strategic purposes. As we have seen in chapter 3, a wide variety of positions, including different forms of self-determination, can still all be considered to stem from the same norm or normative chain.

With this in mind, one of the main contributions of this thesis is to provide an additional level of analysis, with a strong conceptual toolbox used to analyse it. It provides fruitful ground for the further study of devolution or autonomy policies and the impact they have on the electoral and political fortunes of minority nationalist parties. It can also provide a strong opportunity to study, through a different theoretical lens, why the ‘territorialisation’ of state-wide parties can sometimes be problematic for minority nationalist parties who often monopolise the political space surrounding centre/periphery grievances within a given territory (Gillespie, 2015) , as shown by Hepburn in the case of Sardinian minority nationalism t (Hepburn, 2009a).

Minority nationalist parties are driven by self-determination. As rules-bound agents, to what extent are minority nationalist parties impacted by the domestic and international normative, legal, constitutional and political environment in which they operate? Is this a one-way relationship, or are minority nationalist parties, as agents, engaged in a process of mutual constitution with the rules they operate under? To what extent, then, do minority nationalist parties affect and change the political environment?

Fundamentally, the commitment of minority nationalist parties to self-determination expresses itself as a series of normative demands these parties make. As ‘norm entrepreneurs’, minority nationalist parties seek, through a process of norm diffusion, to spread their norm and persuade a sufficient number of ‘critical agents’ to trigger norm cascading, a point where a given norm becomes widely adopted by agents, who regardless of the merits of the individual norm, begin adopting it to comply with other agents around them. The widespread acceptance of the legitimacy of the Scottish referendum, despite opposition to the idea of Scottish independence itself, is a good example of a norm, which can be stated as ‘The Scottish people

should be entitled to external self-determination if they democratically express a wish for it', cascading through agents within the UK domestic sphere.

The extent to which minority nationalist parties have been able to change the institutional, legal and political environment in which they operate varies across cases. In Scotland for instance, the SNP has been able to use its position in government to secure a legitimate independence referendum, resulting in a further deepening of Scottish devolved powers in its aftermath. Other achievements include the undeniable expansion of the role of Gaelic within Scottish politics and society, where once again the SNP was able to use its position in government to implement a range of changes by drawing upon the existing institutional and legal framework surrounding language in Scotland.

In the other two cases, changes have been harder for minority nationalist parties to achieve. While, for instance in Catalonia, changes surrounding the status and place of the Catalan language in society, politics and education have been successfully implemented by minority nationalist parties in government, changes to the institutional and constitutional order have most frequently been met with staunch opposition from the Spanish state. Similarly in Corsica, Corsican nationalists have met with significant opposition when attempting to challenge institutional and constitutional norms in France. While they have been able, once in government, to alter the de facto practice of sub-national power in the French context, the balance of power embodied in the institutional framework of Corsica has not been changed significantly. Whether it is the de facto co-official status of the Corsican language that Corsican nationalists have attempted to implement or the understanding of sub-national government as a 'representative', rather than 'administrative' institution, most of these changes have occurred outside of the formal, legal boundaries of the institutions which they now govern. These changes, by virtue of the legal and institutional uncertainty that surrounds them, are fragile at best.

One of the major contributions of this thesis, and of the constructivist and norm diffusion theoretical framework, is that it theorises a number of major phenomena that can be identified within contemporary minority nationalism. First and foremost, understanding minority nationalist action as a process of norm diffusion highlights one of the fundamental points of constructivism: change is immensely difficult to secure, especially against long-established and highly legitimate institutions and norms. This can provide further fruitful discussion in any subsequent case where minority nationalist party achievement falls short of

minority nationalist party rhetoric both before and after the election. This, in turn, contributes an alternative explanation to changes perceived in minority nationalist party stance and policy-making once in government: from the evidence presented in this thesis, it is incredibly unlikely that a minority nationalist party will be able to implement the totality of its self-determination agenda without facing severe and often insurmountable difficulties.

Minority nationalist parties, despite often pursuing change in the political, legal and institutional framework within which they operate, are also undeniably affected by it. In many respects, this reflects much of the findings of existing literature on minority nationalist party, which frequently emphasises the importance of context and of a very wide range of exogenous elements affecting the overall rhetoric and stance of minority nationalist parties. The relevance of context in all its forms, be it political, economic, ideological, cultural, historical or social, is perhaps one of the most consensual elements established across the literature on minority nationalist parties. This is visible across wide sections of the literature, such as studies on minority nationalism and immigration (Hepburn, 2009b), minority nationalism and its relationship with Europe (Hepburn, 2008; Hepburn and Elias, 2011), minority nationalist party strategy (Elias, Szöcsik and Zuber, 2015), ideology (Elias, 2009) and even more general overviews of minority nationalism in Western Europe (Álvarez Pereira, Portos and Vourdas, 2018; Anderson, 2018).

First and foremost, although minority nationalist parties are all driven by self-determination as a fundamental principle, there are significant differences when one observes the focal points of their rhetoric and aims. Throughout the thesis, I have sought to prove that these differences can broadly be ascribed to differences in political, legal and constitutional context. There are several elements that come into consideration when determining to what extent a given issue will become salient or not within minority nationalist discourse. The first one is conflict. Throughout this thesis, I have shown that the more normative conflict exists between minority nationalist parties and other critical agents around them, the more likely a given issue is to be an important focal point in party rhetoric and action. This is particularly obvious in the case of institutional grievances in Catalonia and identity-based grievances in Corsica. Secondly, the more aligned a given normative framework surrounding an issue is with their own normative expectations, the less likely it is for minority nationalist parties to focus on that given issue. Although this may seem obvious in that few parties actively campaign on issues they do not want to see changed, this occurs at a more fundamental level for minority nationalist parties. Even on issues where these parties would implement different policies given

the chance, so long as the institutional framework allows them to implement these policy preferences, the issue tends to subside in party rhetoric. In other words, insofar as self-determination on a given issue is *possible*, parties will tend to focus on areas where self-determination *is not*.

Another important question addressed in this thesis is the question of change. How do minority nationalist parties secure change? How do they legitimise it?

To understand normative change and norm diffusion, it is important to analyse who, in any given context, are the critical agents norm entrepreneurs will need to persuade for the norm to be broadly accepted at some point in the future. This thesis has highlighted at least three major critical agents. One of the most important, and more relevant critical agents is the central government of the state in which the minority nationalist parties operate. The importance and power of the central government in affecting these parties' ability to implement significant normative change cannot be overstated. In the case of Scotland, the UK government's support for an independence referendum and for subsequent extensions to the devolved powers of Scottish governmental institutions was instrumental in facilitating changes desired by the SNP. Comparatively, similar changes sought by Catalan minority nationalists have been rendered impossible by the staunch opposition of the Spanish state, with tensions peaking at the time of the attempted independence referendum in 2017. Similarly in Corsica, while as we saw above Corsican nationalists have been able to implement a few changes in the way political power is exercised in the Corsican sub-national institutions, few of the institutional demands put forward by minority nationalists have been legally and institutionally implemented.

While minority nationalist parties are often highly critical of government refusals to implement the changes they seek, these parties are highly aware of the crucial role played by central government as a critical agent in norm diffusion. As a result, minority nationalist parties across all three cases have adopted a strategy of delegitimization to encourage central governments to at least open up the possibility of normative and institutional change. A crucial part of this process of delegitimization is democracy and electoral politics, which plays a key role in the strategy of minority nationalist parties in all three cases. Electoral politics however, introduces a second critical agent for minority nationalist parties seeking change at the domestic level: the electorate within the territory they seek to represent (or their own 'people', so to speak).

Across all three cases, minority nationalist parties have been extremely successful at persuading their local electorate to support the normative changes they seek to implement. This fact, illustrated by repeated electoral successes across all three cases and throughout the period studied, has enabled these parties to use democratic legitimacy as a tool to delegitimise opposition to their policy platform.

In securing repeated significant electoral successes since 2007, the SNP were gradually able to legitimise the possibility of independence and, consequently, delegitimise state opposition to a referendum. Arguing that the ‘Scottish people’, a relatively uncontroversial notion within British politics, had repeatedly expressed a wish for an independence referendum, the UK government as a critical agent accepted and endorsed the norm according to which, broadly, ‘the right to self-determination should apply to the Scottish people’. The result of this, an independence referendum and subsequent institutional reform, enabled the SNP to implement many of its core institutional demands.

Comparatively, the use of democratic legitimacy to convince the central state as a critical agent to accept at least some minority nationalist demands has been less successful in Catalonia and Corsica. In Catalonia, the democratic legitimacy gathered by minority nationalists has done little to soften central government opposition. Even in 2017, when democratic legitimacy was used to create a critical juncture in the form of a major constitutional crisis, the central Spanish government did not alter its stance, instead using its legal legitimacy to coerce Catalan minority nationalist parties into stepping back from their immediate pursuit of unilateral independence.

Similarly in France, Corsican minority nationalist successes have done little to change the stance of the French central government on major relevant issues. Despite initial hope that electoral legitimacy would force the French government to engage in a dialogue with governing minority nationalists, this process has had a little impact and most of the major demands put forward by minority nationalist parties, including all of those put forward in the ‘*prugettu cumunu*’ which formed the basis of their electoral success, remain unrealised.

While minority nationalist parties have relied heavily on democratic legitimacy to legitimise their own demands and delegitimise opposition to them, parties have encountered limited success in achieving their aims. This in turn, can be explained by introducing several other critical agents, namely the state-wide electorate, and European level institutions and leaders.

Minority nationalist parties have traditionally neglected the electorate outside of the territory they seek to represent. However, this electorate is crucial insofar as it provides democratic legitimacy to another critical agent, the central government, which can then be opposed to the democratic legitimacy minority nationalists claim within their own territory. As I argued in the case of Catalonia, despite the democratic legitimacy gathered by minority nationalists within Catalonia, the Spanish government felt little incentive to alter its position insofar as it maintained broad support for its approach across the rest of Spain. This phenomenon is amplified in Corsica, by virtue of the territory's peripheral nature and small size relative to the rest of France.

Another set of critical agents that minority nationalist parties have not neglected, however are European-level critical agents, including European institutions and European leaders. Despite strong attempts to campaign for and legitimise their aims at the European level, the limited access given to minority nationalists to major European institutions, coupled with the relative strength of states and national governments within these institutions, have limited the impact of minority nationalists at the European level. While much of this remained theoretical until 2017, the Catalan crisis highlighted that, faced with a critical juncture, European-level critical agents almost unanimously supported the Spanish state, despite continuous and sustained attempts by Catalan minority nationalists to raise awareness and support for their demands at the European level.

However, despite difficulties at the European-level, this thesis confirms the existing notion that minority nationalist parties have not abandoned the European-level arena entirely, despite in many cases retreating back to the domestic sphere as their primary sphere of action. The fifth chapter in the thesis highlights some of the limitations, as well as some of the opportunities made available by European-level institutions and connections in the context of a normative contest. The empirical findings of the chapter also highlight that minority nationalist party stances have remained relatively stable, with all three cases echoing previous findings in the literature. The relative absence of any European-level discussion within day-to-day minority nationalist rhetoric in Corsica observed in this thesis echoes the indifference and occasional scepticism described in previous studies (Elias, 2008b; Hepburn and Elias, 2011). The enthusiasm displayed by the SNP in favour of European-level political participation and institutions appears to be a continuation of a general trend towards pro-European positioning started in the late 1980s (Keating, 2004; Hepburn, 2006, 2008) while Catalonia's pragmatic perception of European-level institutions as an important source of values and as a valuable,

albeit flawed, arena through which to promote their ideas, echoes previous studies on the place of Europe in Catalan minority nationalism (Ehrlich, 1997; Giordano and Roller, 2002; Borgen, 2010).

The thesis and its findings raise important questions for the future. Considering the relative failure of democratic legitimacy in forcing through major institutional changes, to what extent will minority nationalist parties in government focus on operating within existing institutions as opposed to focusing on change? To what extent will the democratic legitimacy of minority nationalists be hampered by their inability to implement most of the changes they aspired to? Future electoral performance will be crucial to understand whether minority nationalists retain a strong degree of democratic support within their own territories, or whether recent events have damaged their credibility to an extent. The potential for future mutual constitution between minority nationalist parties and the institutional framework within which they operate is strong, but the question is which ‘direction’ this mutual constitution is mostly likely to occur in the immediate future.

As identified in the literature, minority nationalist parties have gradually become more suspicious and more indifferent towards the promise of European-level institutions as a new arena for them to legitimise and implement their changes. The question remains whether the Catalan example, and the failure of European Union institutions and European leaders to assist Catalan minority nationalists, will further reinforce the apathy and suspicion felt by minority nationalist parties towards the European-level political arena.

Finally, the thesis provides a strong basis upon which to analyse further cases in different areas. While the conceptual tools used here appear highly fruitful in explaining minority nationalist activity and rhetoric, further research would be useful to determine whether these tools apply across all cases in very different contexts, or whether it applies primarily to minority nationalist movements within democratic societies in Europe. While it is reasonable to assume that minority nationalist parties engage in processes of mutual constitution, further research would analyse and highlight which tools minority nationalists in non-democratic societies can use to legitimise their own demands and secure changes. Despite significant tensions surrounding minority nationalist attempts to enforce their own normative preferences, it would be important to determine whether the relatively peaceful nature of minority nationalist party activity within the three cases is a consequence of the minority nationalist

parties themselves, or a broader consequence of the democratic societies within which they operate and to which they are committed.

Appendix A – List of interviews conducted for this study.

1. Paul Molac – Member of Parliament for the 4th constituency of Morbihan (Brittany)
La République en Marche (formerly *Union Démocratique Bretonne*)
Interview conducted by telephone on the 5th July 2016.
2. Gilles Simeoni – President of the Executive Council of the *Collectivité Territoriale de Corse*
Pè a Corsica
Interview conducted at the *Collectivité Territoriale de Corse*, Ajaccio, 21st September 2016.
3. Jean-Guy Talamoni – President of the Corsican Assembly.
Pè a Corsica
Interview conducted at the *Collectivité Territoriale de Corse*, Ajaccio, 21st September 2016.
4. Max Zañartu – President of the European Free Alliance Youth (EFAY)
Joventuts D'Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
Interview conducted by telephone on the 28th September 2016.
5. Christian Allard – Former Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for North East Scotland (2013-2016).
Scottish National Party
Interview conducted by telephone on the 13th December 2016.
6. David Grosclaude – Former regional councillor of the *Aquitaine* region (2010-2015)
Partit Occitan
Interview conducted by telephone on the 17th January 2017.
7. Alyn Smith – Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for Scotland
Scottish National Party
Interview conducted at the European Parliament, Brussels, 21st March 2017.
8. Ramon Tremosa i Balcells – Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for Spain
Partit Demòcrata European Català
Interview conducted at the European Parliament, Brussels, 21st March 2017.
9. Jill Evans – Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for Wales
Plaid Cymru
Interview conducted at the European Parliament, Brussels, 21st March 2017.

Topics covered in semi-structured interviews

- Self-determination as a principle, and its relevance to the action of minority nationalist parties (all interviews).
- The importance of minority languages (all except interviews **5** and **7**).
- The importance of electoral politics in achieving political goals (all interviews).
- The question of political violence (interviews **2** and **3**)
- Historical development of minority nationalist party demands and positions (interviews **2**, **3**, **8** and **7**)
- The relationship between minority nationalist parties and its relevance (all interviews).
- The relevance of Europe as a political space for minority nationalist parties (interviews **1**, **5**, **6**, **7**, **8** and **9**).

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