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Speaking from the Periphery:

*La Questione della Lingua Meridionale*

"This thesis has been submitted on this day of April 15th, 2014 in partial fulfillment of the degree requirements for the NYU Global Liberal Studies Bachelor of Arts degree."
This thesis explores the hegemonic powers that Northern Italy maintains over Southern Italy, specifically the way in which they function through cultural manifestations such as language and literature. It discusses how this power may have developed, how it may maintain its position, and how it may be resisted.

Using Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and its sub theories of the intellectual, education, and prestige, the thesis questions how power radiates from the North to the South and how this affects the dialectic that nevertheless exists between the two. It asks: in what ways does the North construct the South? And, in what ways does this South take shape? The thesis will look specifically at the how discourse and culture flow from the center to the periphery and how representation helps to fuel this ongoing conflict.

Briefly reviewing the lingual history of Florentine, how it developed from a literary tradition into the standard language, the discussion then turns to how resistance to the cultural power of the North may be found in literature through a close-reading of two literary examples: *I Malavoglia* by Giovanni Verga and *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* Carlo Levi. These texts are used to both further explore Gramsci’s theory as well as give examples of cultural works that possibly contribute to hegemonic discourse; specific attention is paid to the role of the author in each case and opens into a discussion of subaltern literature and “subculture”. The conclusion explores the discussion of the Italian South in relation to and within the emergent critical category of “The Global South.”
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Chapter One: How the Self was Won

The acquisition of language is the first step toward building a society. By allowing people a communal method of communication, it also fosters a communal identity. It is only through the creation of a collective identity, a culture, that societies are then made able to define their borders and themselves from that which surrounds them, much like the infant who sees himself in the glass (Lacan 94).\(^1\) What the society gains through this realization of itself is much larger than a simple distinguishing capability or identity: it is the formation of a cultural power, necessarily imbedded in the use of language, that is not explicit but is rather subtle and conveyed socially, and eventually informs national consciousness.

This is not simply realized through the capability to speak with one group and the incapability to do so with another, but rather what comes from being able to speak to one another: the sharing of experiences and understanding one another beyond the lingual plane. In this way, the national consciousness is also an ideology as it is a perspective, a conception of the world that is facilitated by language. Likewise, the presence of dialect within an ostensibly uniformly languaged nation challenges this conception and, by way of, national unity.\(^2\) As we will see, it is common for the strongest class, economically and culturally, to dominate the language and thus hold particular control over the discourse of history.

As Einar Haugen points out in his *Dialect, Language, Nation* (1966), language and the nation have become inextricably intertwined: the nation is dependent upon the language for creation and stabilization of a national identity, while the language is dependent upon the nation for its development (Haugen 927). He draws examples from

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\(^1\) Lacan’s mirror stage.

\(^2\) For a more thorough discussion of the relationship between language and dialect, please see Chambers’s and Trudgill’s *Dialectology*. 
as far back as the ancient Greek and Roman empires, spreading their languages as a means of unification, and alludes to multiple other periods in which the nation was built alongside the language that was to become its standard. Saussure, too, discusses the reciprocity between language and nation: “the culture of a nation exerts an influence on its language, and the language, on the other hand, is largely responsible for the nation,” (Saussure 20). It is the ability of language to enable cultural power that allows it to function as the spinal cord in the backbone of nationalism. It should be clear, however, that it is the cultural currency that often comes with the economic superiority of a given class that motivates the choice of one dialect over another. The difference between language and dialect, as will be discussed, wields such power as to become a political force.

The application of linguistics outside of its own sphere increased exponentially in the late 1920’s with the introduction of semiotics by Saussure who increased reliance on semiology throughout the humanities. This “linguistic turn,”3 while opening yet another position through which to interrogate various subjects, has led to ambiguities and redefinitions of the vocabulary originally intended for strictly linguistic purposes. For the most part, this has been to our academic advantage because new meanings mean new opportunities for exploration and new ways in which to do it, though, at times, it is difficult to know which terms and which definitions to use. When discussing culture, difficult in itself to define, the most precise terms make the most effective tools for illuminating the subject, while employing multiple definitions allows us freedom to move between absolutes, of which there are none in cultural studies anyway. Therefore, instead of limiting ourselves within the confines of a single definition, I

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3 The recognition and incorporation of language as an important technology used in the making of meaning by humanity (Chandler).
would rather use a more expansive but no less specific interpretation of what is meant by the encompassing term *language*. In order to do this, language will be defined by its multiple parts and areas that usually do not appear within the same description but nevertheless are pertinent and reconcilable.

Saussure initially divided language into two categories—external and internal elements. External elements include everything that has to do with the system of language that is not the system of language itself; in contrast, the internal elements only deal with the inner workings of language as a system\(^4\) (Saussure 20). For Saussure, language is a structured system of conventional signs that work referentially with other signs in order to produce meaning and is to be studied synchronically.\(^5\) The whole system of language may be thought of as a newsroom, with the press machine as the internal elements of language, the product of which—the newspaper and everything that happens to that newspaper—may be seen as external elements. For this discussion, the primary concern is located between the external and internal boundaries where societies and cultures are shaped.\(^6\)

The colloquial uses and distortions of these external elements—how language is used—have the most potential to shape, mold, even mutilate the cultures to which they are native because the native speakers are the first actors of a given language. In this way, language is inextricably tied to culture and the resulting society that proceeds from it. The example in highest relief that best illustrates this statement is the difference between dialects and languages and the relationship between the two. The first known

\(^4\) He gives the example of the vocal organs as being part of the external elements because they do not affect the system of signs within language itself; a malfunction in the vocal chords does not change the language they are using, just the way it is heard in that instant.

\(^5\) Due to a deficiency of words in English, “language” is often mistaken for its inner elements: *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* does not exist in the material world, it is instead the realm of unarticulated objects and ideas. It is only through language, as a system of signs, which this nebulous cloud of abstract ideas is brought into being (*Ferdinand 847*). *Parole* is what we define as speech, or “concrete utterances,” the spoken word (*Ferdinand 847*). It should be noted that this excludes written language.

\(^6\) For a picture of a news press, please see Appendix A.
use of the word *dialect* is in the French dictionary, Hatzfeld and Darmesteter’s, in the mid-16th century and is in reference to the many recognizable idioms of Greek (Haugen 923). Here, the term dialect defines one of a group of closely related yet independently recognizable lingual practices and seems to be born out of necessity in the specific context in which there was no unified dominant language. These multiple practices eventually converged, or rather gave way, to one unified language that was predominantly the dialect of Athens at the time; after convergence, all other dialects disappeared from use.

Again we are faced with two different meanings of language depending on how one looks to define them. If language is taken synchronically, it may mean a single linguistic norm—dialect—or a group of related norms—a common practice or language system (Haugen). For example, Venetian, Florentine, and Milanese are dialects, varieties of Italian, Italian being the overarching norm that connects them all. However, if we look at language diachronically, it is either in expiration or in birth, resulting from a convergence of previously separated idioms. Language, in all of these definitions, is always a common idiom and never a variety of another (Haugen 923). However, when we attempt to define both language and dialect side by side, the task becomes significantly more ambiguous. The definition of dialect can be divided between common usage and a more technical, linguistic usage. A dialect commonly is considered to be a form of language that is inferior in some way to the standard, usually spoken in regional parts or small groups of people who are equally regarded as inferior to the standard culture; it is often seen as an "aberration" of a correct language (Chambers 3).

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7 Haugen gives a detailed history of sorts for the term dialect and in the process illuminates different lingual situations around the globe.

8 Dialects may be further broken down by their function, whether they are used in writing or if they are used solely for speaking. Those that are used only for speaking are called *patois*, again a term taken from French (Haugen 924).
Technically, in academic circles and within the study of linguistics, the separation and distinction between language and dialect still remains problematic. As Chambers and Trudgill point out in their text, *Dialectology* (1980), it is not an easy question to answer primarily because different language systems function in different ways. The authors give the example of mutual intelligibility in which language may be defined as a, "collection of mutually intelligible dialects," able to be understood between one another without prior explicit knowledge of another dialect (Chambers 3). The problem that then arises comes when we are confronted with a single language, like German, that encompasses multiple dialects that are not mutually intelligible. In addition, there are separate languages, such as the Scandinavian languages of Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish, which do share such similarity that the users of any of the three may understand the other two languages with ease (Chambers 4). Moreover, the ability to understand another dialect varies between them socially and geographically. Chambers and Trudgill suggest the phenomenon of a "geographic dialect continua," which describes the relationship between linguistic difference and geographical distance from a given point (Chambers 6). For example, if we take Milan as our center, as we travel south to Florence the linguistic differences in total, will be greater than the differences found between Milanese and what is spoken in Turin.

The trouble with these definitions is often mollified by the introduction of more terms that fit along functional lines; for example, the term "variety" may be used to denote a form of speaking that is considered a single entity, while dialect may be defined as a variety that differs grammatically and/or lexically from other varieties (Chambers 5). Therefore, we must forge our own definition of dialect as well. While I do not agree with the pejorative connotation that is implicit in the colloquial definition of
dialect, I think it is important to take this definition in order to better understand the conditions that surround its use as well as the implications of such use. In this way, the term dialect does not hold any meaning without reference to a fully developed language, and therefore cannot be used without mention of a whole language. This relationship necessarily gives power to the whole system of language and leaves dialect as secondary and underdeveloped. Dialect in this way must necessarily be thought of diachronically, because it must always be considered in terms of the language to which it belongs or to which it is most closely related.

As a colloquial term, dialect is further complicated depending on the geography in which it is used. In Italy for example, there exists multiple dialects that are indicative of the varying regions, but also, in some cases, of small cities or villages. The only thing that links them together is their difference and likeness to Florentine, what is now the standard Italian language. Despite having similar origins, each dialect has a varying degree of difference and similarity to the standard language. Dealing more externally with these terms, the words dialect and language colloquially in Italian society today have particular connotations and vary quite a bit from past meanings. Today, a statement referring to another dialect as a completely different language may not only be said to point negatively to the dialect itself—as being inferior to the standard language for lack of structure or polish—but rather as connoting something inferior about the specific city or regional culture which gave rise to that dialect. This is often said about Sicilian which is a particularly distinguishable dialect, molded by the continual waves of foreign rulers throughout its history which resulted in a distinct language and culture.

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9 One of a group of closely related yet independently recognizable lingual practices that fall under the umbrella of a developed language.
10 It should be noted that the difference is much more the referential than the similarity as more often than not, dialects rarely bare much similarity to Florentine.
Because language is a tool, it is often described, defined, and developed based on its functionality. In Italy, especially in the mid 1300's—*il trecento*—when *la questione della lingua* was beginning to stir, the term *il volgare* was commonly used to refer to any everyday speech in relation to Latin. It is important to note that there was no value placed on “dialects” when using this term at the time. *Il volgare* was not a negative term because there did not exist a positive alternative: Latin would have been the only other option to *il volgare*, what we would translate to the vernacular, but it did not occupy the same space. To be clear, the vernacular may be defined as an underdeveloped language which has not been used for as many functions as a fully developed language may be capable of in a society larger than a peasant village or tribe (Haugen 927). It will be used interchangeably with *il volgare* and in some contexts with dialect, as every vernacular is a dialect, while a dialect may be more developed than a vernacular. We must keep in mind that dialect does not have all the power that an official language does, but it does have the potential. In Italian society in the 1300’s, Latin was reserved for the learned, the church, and official administration; the vernacular was used for everything else. In this way the two forms of speech were quite separated along functional lines. It is this distinction that allowed writers of the time to enjoy the use of both languages simultaneously; it is also why the Catholic Church did not feel any pressure from the use of the vernacular in writing, as serious literature was still written in Latin until the 1300s. The work of Petrarch, who predominantly wrote in Latin but is designated as the example on which standard poetic language should be based, demonstrates the coexistence of Latin and the vernacular in a harmonious environment (Lockwood 248).

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11 Again, I would like to stress my contention with the negative connotations of these terms. The utility that they offer is, however, much more valuable than an ambiguous list of more polite terms.
There are many ways to interpret the shift from classical language—Latin and Greek—to the vernacular, and it varies from situation to situation. Language in any situation, however, as a social tool to communicate, to form meaning, is purposeful and moves forward only as its functionality allows it to within a defined context. Due to its extremely social nature there are many forces that can affect this shift, none of which is directly responsible for a dramatic change in direction. To be sure, Latin was the dominant language in Italy from the Roman Empire through the Middle Ages, as it had its place as the medium of religious content and official purposes. The vernacular was likewise chosen for a purpose: that of reflecting the contemporary world and the importance of the new ideas being born at the time. Similarly, although not nearly as simply, the many dialects were disregarded in favor of a singular language with its purpose of further unifying the new nation and solidifying an Italian identity. I do not mean to suggest that this shift from the classical to the vernacular was inconsequential or easy; what I rather mean to say is that there were many more and divergent motivations working towards a unified language than there were towards the insurgence of the vernacular. The emergence and subsequent popularity of the vernacular came about rather suddenly, taking only about one century for it to be visible in great works of literature, whereas the development of a standard Italian language was in question for over five and not closed until well into the 19th century.

The first known literary works written in one of the many Italian dialects was the lyric poetry of the Scuola siciliana—“the first coherent group of poets writing in an Italian vernacular” (Kleinhenz). Their work began with the appropriation of the Provençal tradition of courtly love themes and gave way to a new form of literature which would reshape Italian lyric poetry and eventually literature as a whole. The group was composed of about twelve poets who served in the court of Frederick II, king
of Sicily from 1198 and king of Germany from 1212 until his death in 1250 (Kleinhenz). Frederick’s lineage gives view to the complicated history of Sicily centuries before unification in 1861. He was the son of Henry VI, heir to the German throne, and Constance, heiress of Roger, the Norman king of Sicily, both nations of which had claims and ruled over Sicily at one time or another (Alighieri 101). Despite the turmoil in which he assumed the throne, Frederick created a vibrant court culture in Sicily and sponsored intellectual and creative thought throughout his reign. He not only founded the University of Naples in 1224, but also delineated a new legal code which strove to combine law from ancient Normandy and modern day (Racine). Poets and scholars from a number of diverse cultures were drawn to this court’s particularly lively and intellectual presence. However, it was the work of this single group within the court which had the most influence on Italian literary tradition (Kleinhenz).

These cortigiani—courtiers—served multiple purposes within the court and were trained in elite forms of Sicilian used for official purposes. The school’s most prolific poet, Giacomo da Lentini, was also known for his primary role in the court, as his nickname, “il Notaro”—the notary—suggests (Ferroni 1: 135). These poets had the idea to transplant the courtly love lyric from Provençal into Sicilian. However, their intention was not solely to expand the culture of their court; they rather chose this tradition as a means by which to demonstrate their abilities and the abilities of the court. Above all, they intended to create a “literary language capable of reflecting the prestige and virtue of the court of which they were part” (Ferroni 1: 135).

This was accomplished with a few different techniques, the first and most important of which was the language in which they chose to write. While it would not have been considered such at the time, the Sicilian in which these poems were originally written is considered a dialect; it bears repeating, however, that at the time this was an
elevated form of Sicilian that was used for administrative and literary purposes (Keen). The desire to write in *il volgare* instead of Latin is not made explicit, but it has been suggested that the poets believed *il volgare* to be the only language capable of describing their contemporary world (Ferroni 1: 135). To further their goal, the *Scuola* elevated the themes and subject matter of the original courtly love poetry by making it more abstract, adding more layers, and thinking more critically about the relationship between the lady, who acted as the lord, and the poet-lover, the lord’s vassal (Keen). As the development of the subject continued, the poets required a more expressive form in which to work; the birth of the sonnet, attributed to Giacomo da Lentini, commonly known as the leader of the *Scuola*, was first used in his work and continued from there to shape Italian lyric tradition (Ferroni 1: 136).

Between 1250 and 1260, the new lyric poetry traveled north with Frederick’s court to Bologna, where it was taken up by Guittone d’Arezzo (Feroni 1: 137). While a great deal of attention was drawn to the new style by way of Guittone’s work, who produced over three hundred sonnets and canzoni, there was a considerable amount of translation from the original Sicilian to Tuscan and then distribution amongst other poets of the time (Ferroni 1: 137). Unfortunately, this part of Italian literary history tends to be glossed over by the public in haste to know the more immediate history leading up to the adoption of Florentine as standard Italian that begins with Dante. While I do not want to diminish the importance of the more antique origins of the Italian language, they are nevertheless much more removed from us than they were from Dante and are now only brought up as a consequence of a single author’s ingenuity.

The writer and character Dante Alighieri is responsible for many of the developments which initiated the movement towards a standardized language. When
the new lyric style arrived in Florence from Sicily, Dante along with a group of his closest friends and other poets adopted the new style and began to improve on it, making it their own. This unofficial group came to be called the *dolce stil novo*, as named by Dante himself in Canto XXIV of the *Purgatorio* (PUR XXXIV). The poets who influenced Dante’s growth the most within this group are Guido Guinizelli, who Dante considers to be the father of this new style, and Guido Cavalcanti, Dante’s at one time “first friend” and mentor before they diverged on different theological paths. The *dolce stil novo* is the evolved form of what was started by the *Scuola Siciliana*; it is softer, more intellectual, and deviates from the original feudal example given by the *Scuola*. Dante’s most celebrated work within this tradition is the *Vita Nuova* (1295), a compilation of lyric poetry surrounded by narrative which demonstrates his tendency to revisit his past thoughts and then move beyond them. He would eventually elaborate and then break from this tradition to go on to such works as the *Commedia*.

Before he wrote his *capolavoro*, *la Divina Commedia* (c. 1321), Dante wrote *De vulgari eloquentia* (c. 1303–c. 1305), in which he proposes a unified literary language drawn from the best elements of all Italian dialects in order to preserve universality (Baran’ski). With this text, he is credited with the first proposal for the greater nobility of the vernacular over Latin (Baran’ski). With Dante, as a theorist who supports the wider use of the vernacular for literary purposes and as an artist whose work demonstrates the strengths of this argument, a new movement began. However, despite this incredible contribution and commencement of the movement toward standardization, Dante’s text is not the example on which modern Italian is based. It is

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12 Instead, love for the lady is ennobling and renders the poet-lover the best version of himself. Possibly explain this in greater detail here.
rather Petrarch’s example of poetry and Boccaccio’s example of prose which make up the ideal versions on which prose and poetry should be based.

These examples were originally proposed in 1525 by Bembo, a prominent Venetian poet, in his *Prose della volgar lingua*, in which he defines the parameters of a new Italian language and how to go about circulating it. He believed that the standard Italian language should be based on an enduring form of Florentine: that is, not a spoken contemporary form that is easily influenced and changed, nor a courtly form which is also subject to excessive variation. He specifically chose Florentine because of its rich literary tradition, which began with Dante but did not see its full refinement until Petrarch and Boccaccio began writing in the late 14th century (c. 1327-1350).

What makes Bembo’s argument for literary Florentine stronger than other opinions, and eventually adopted, is its practicality: dispersing the new standardized language which is based on an already established literary form is significantly easier and quicker than requiring Italians from all over the peninsula to travel to Florence in order to learn what is spoken there. In this plan, Bembo thought it best that literary language should remain faithful to the great writers of the past and thus be learnt through imitation just as Latin was learnt from Virgil and Cicero (Hastings). It was not until after Unification in 1861, however, that the matter was relatively settled.¹³

*La questione della lingua* was thrown into high relief with the advent of printing in the 16th century and the popularity of texts in the vernacular (Hastings). Around this time, there was an exponential increase in vernacular literacy and a building derision for dialects other than Florentine (Maiden). As a way of regulating what most agreed should be the new standard, the Academia della Crusca was founded in 1582 and the first dictionary of sorts, the *Vocabulario*, was published in 1612 (Nencioni 345). We can

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¹³ For a map of Italy just prior to Unification, please see Appendix B.
better understand the argument and struggle over language through this early version of the dictionary. For starters, the structure denotes an extremely purist vision of the language. Each lemma is presented with an example from one of the best writers of the 14th century; it did not include any entries that did not pertain to men of letters, therefore nothing technical or craft related was included, nor was there any colloquial counterpart as there was in France (Nencioni 346).

With both shifts in language—from the classical to a vernacular, and from many vernaculars to a single dominant form—there is a particular relationship between the chosen language and its economic context, and a secondary relationship between the language and the nation. Both narratives form along functional lines, and the function is determined by the way in which a particular language is used. For example, Latin’s function was to communicate the discourse of religion and to maintain and strengthen the identity of the Catholic Church, hence became a powerful language that would remain in use for centuries due to the social class that employed and promoted it. W.B. Lockwood, a professor of philology at the University of Reading, sees the shift from Latin to the vernacular as a consequence of socio-economic change. He suggests that the popularity of the vernacular at this time was a consequence of the rise of the city and its economic challenge to the feudal countryside, which also created and nourished a new kind of society, a new kind of art that “revealed its conscience clearest in literature” (Lockwood 247). In this way, it is an historical and economic progression of societal organization, formerly around the feudal estate, now around the city, that allowed the vernacular to rise above and take the place of the classical. For him, Dante was the leader of this “new, progressive, influential social group,” that, maybe not consciously, took advantage of this opportunity that was presented by history to move the vernacular forward (Lockwood 249).
The question of consciousness in this decision is complicated because the vernacular was chosen by these artists for a particular and social reason: because the classical was not vivid or lively enough to picture their world, and the social power of the vernacular, as Dante explicitly states in his *De vulgari eloquentia*, had the potential to do so and to do it more naturally (Lockwood 247). That is to say that the vernacular could reach many more people and reach them in a familiar way. Dante proved this with his *Divina Commedia*, which became an example of what he himself posited nearly two decades before. The popularity and wide use of the vernacular became the practical choice for the new trade-oriented world of the *trecento*.

Just as the vernacular took the place of the classical, so the variety of vernaculars may be diminished in favor of a single version. However, this shift is slightly different, and in Italy’s case more difficult, because of the additional cultural magnitude that is inherent in this second shift. The same rise of the city which led to the cultural dominance of Florence also enabled Florentine—drawing on the city’s economic, social, and cultural status—to become the standard language. What is implicit in this decision culturally will ultimately rise again during the unification process centuries later. The inexplicit idea that is necessary to make this jump from many popular vernaculars—for, it should be noted, that any of the existing Italian dialects in the 1500’s which had literary traditions could have easily been chosen instead—to a single one is at its core a value judgment based on socio-cultural trends: Florentine was considered by many influential people to be more prestigious than any other dialect. “Influential” here denotes the wealthy, the educated, and those who worked in any of the courts existing at that time—as Bembo did—or other popular and well-respected intellectuals. The role of the intellectual will be explored in the following chapters, but for now it is important to know how they played a role in this debate. This phenomenon is seen in other
historical examples. Haugen points to two languages occurring in very distinct time periods—that of Athenian in the postclassical period and Parisian in the 12th century—which become the dominant and eventual universal languages of their respective nations due to each city’s cultural and economic dominance (Haugen 923-924).

In Italy, we have a concrete example of this phenomenon with the text *I promessi sposi*, the *Betrothed*, by Alessandro Manzoni. Originally written in his own Milanese dialect and published in 1827, the novel was rereleased after the author translated it into Florentine in 1840 (Jones). As a writer, he was incredibly invested in the continuing debate of *la questione della lingua*; since by now the matter of which dialect had been decided, the discussion in the 1800’s turned toward what kind it should be—a somewhat classical and solely written form or a more fluid, contemporary spoken form (Hastings). Manzoni’s decision to rework his novel in the spoken Florentine of his day was informed by this discussion and acted as an example of his dedication to his perspective on the issue (Hastings).

The language question was not a contained discussion only had in Italy but a conflict that rose in every European nation before its true birth; in a certain capacity, a nation can not be said to exist if it does not have a singular developed and shared language with which to conduct business and regulate internal operations. In this way, the nation is very much like the child in Lacan’s theory who only comes to know himself through language. With Italy as our guide, it is not difficult to see how the adoption of a language influences the formation of the nation, but we will come back to this point. There is a significant amount of discourse on the rise of nationalism in Europe following the French Revolution into the 19th century that could inform this discussion; however, our concern is with the northern European movement towards nationalism as it has to do with Italy rather than an exhaustive historical account. What is called *la questione*
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meridionale—the Southern Question—in Italy occurs on a European scale beginning in early 1800’s. For our reference, we will rely on the political bodies that were defined in 1850.

Beginning in the 1600’s, the cultural center of Europe shifted from the Mediterranean, which had been largely dominated by Italy for over a century, to north and west of the Alps, primarily to Holland, England, and France (Moe 14). This move was partially due to the economic downturn in Italy at the time, but also as a result of building industrial power in the north. As industry increasingly became the measure of modernity, Italy was viewed as descending into decadence and into the past according to northern Europeans (Moe 16). This decadence was gradually romanticized in relation to the cold progress of the north: Italy being literally in the geographic south meant that the climate was much more suited for easy living, where agricultural pursuits were more easily accomplished and the landscape was more often defined as a terrestrial Eden than a normal human inhabitance. Whether or not this was true, it was the prevailing image of Italy at the time and it was in drastic contrast to the reality of the European north, where food was not easily grown, weather conditions were harsh, and people had to labor more in order to live there. As Nelson Moe, a professor of Italian at Columbia University, states, “the vision of Italy that takes form between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries thus alternates between denunciations of backwardness and exaltations of picturesqueness,” (Moe 17). Italy became the far removed, picturesque past highlighted by its ugly and backward present; its decadence made it appear a paradise of sorts, an escape from harsh reality. This idea was made popular and supported in many travel journals and accounts by northern Europeans who vacationed there which continued well into the early 20th century (Moe 15).
As each of these kingdoms came into national consciousness, i.e. developed a national identity, they also began forming the identity of northern Europe as a region. By defining themselves and finding similarities with their neighbors, they outlined the differences between two halves of today’s “Western” Europe, both spatially and culturally. It is spatially defined by borders—the literal lines that the new nations drew on maps to confine and distinguish their territories. It is culturally defined by the people these nations chose to include within their borders and those they chose to exclude outside of them. By creating the North, the northern countries equally and just as tangibly created the South; the excluded in this case are the southern European nations of Spain, Portugal, the Italian Kingdoms, and Greece. In 1815, Italy was broken up into four powerful Kingdoms—Piedmont-Sardinia, Lombardy-Venetia, the Two Sicilies, and the Papal States—and four smaller duchies of varying size and influence—Tuscany, Parma, Modena, Lucca. There was no singular Italian political state or self-image as such; and even more, the Austrian Empire, which ruled the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia and had a strong presence in the rest of the peninsula, crushed any rising nationalist sentiment that threatened their authority. This meant that, without a shared national identity, Italy did not yet have the means by which to challenge this forced image of itself as part of the South. To use Roberto Dainotto’s idea, it became the internalized Other of Europe with no means of positioning itself otherwise (Dainotto 39).

At the time when northern European nations began solidifying their borders, the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia sought to raise itself to the standard that was forming among northern European nations, and for this it required greater territory. Given its politically liberal environment, Piedmont was disposed to the development of more

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14 Powerful in relation to the duchies, not to the other European kingdoms.
organized socio-political groups.\textsuperscript{15} However, it should be understood that the intention
was not to unify the peninsula; rather it was solely to increase the power and influence
of the Kingdom of Piedmont. Italian unification was more of an accident than a
concerted effort on the part of any one party or a unanimous nationalistic sentiment
(Riall).\textsuperscript{16} The period leading up to Unification in 1861 was tremendously unstable and
was characterized by revolts from all classes. One of the problems that faced the
Piedmontese government when trying to unite the various duchies was precisely this
unstable and skeptical nature of the various political and social groups. Although there
were a few larger political groups in favor of unification, a lack of persistence or an
abundance of imprudence led to the failure of many attempted revolts.

In the end, Garibaldi’s military campaign, in which he led 1,000 men from Bronte,
Sicily to the edge of the Papal States, was not planned or intended by the Kingdom of
Piedmont but was rather the general’s own undertaking and success (Astarita 284).
Even this success was due more so to an abundance of confusion and a sweeping show
of arms rather than a swelling nationalist feeling among the Italian territories. Lacking
awareness of the conditions and exploitative circumstances to which the southern
peasantry was subjected, Garibaldi and his men on arrival in Bronte, Sicily, in August
1860 misunderstood the revolting masses as savages who would threaten unification
(Astarita 285). Indeed, Unification was largely aided by the cooperation of the landed
nobility, who, on witnessing Garibaldi’s unrelenting momentum, abandoned support for
their king and aligned with the lone general. In this way political unification was nearly

\textsuperscript{15} Piedmont was the most liberal at the time: it was the only territory that was able to maintain a
constitutional monarchy after the fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna. This allowed citizens
considerable flexibility and political involvement that was not seen anywhere else in Italy at the time due
to Austrian domination.

\textsuperscript{16} For a detailed account of Unification, please see Lucy Riall’s, \textit{Risorgimento}. 
completed within the year that it took Garibaldi to make his way up the boot of Italy to Rome; cultural unification, however, had yet to occur.

When the Kingdom of Piedmont found itself with the whole of Italy in its hands, it was propelled into European politics as a united nation but was nevertheless characterized as “South,” that is, unification, or rather the acquisition of more land, did not result in making Piedmont the European power it had hoped to become. It only established Piedmont as the governing body of a southern country—which is to say nothing greater than the southern country itself and no more part of Europe than before. What Piedmont sought to do once it found itself in this position was to recast itself as the dominating force over the rest of Italy, thus distinguishing itself and its immediate neighboring provinces as superior over the “South.” In this way, it sought to dominate the discourse of Italy by positioning itself as a “Northern” European power which oversees the South of Italy just as the Northern European countries oversee the South of Europe.

This shift in position was not unprecedented. As we have seen in the development of the Italian language, the original center of cultural development and linguistic expertise and style was in the deep South, in Palermo, Sicily—both capitals of the South at one time or another. The movement up to Tuscany and specifically to Florence in the mid 1300’s, coupled with the cultural and economic boom that Florence experienced at that time, allowed for the city to become the uncontested cultural center and the language the best candidate for the national standard. While the actual standardization was not realized until the 19th century, the reason for Florentine’s candidacy and eventual success began with a relatively brief occurrence that lasted no

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17 In reference to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which combined the Kingdom of Naples and the Kingdom of Sicily; both Naples and Palermo can and were considered capitals of the South and both held the title at one point or another in history.
more than fifty years and can be encapsulated in the works and lives of three authors. However, the lingual hegemony that Florentine came to wield took over five hundred years to strengthen and calcify. Since the 14th century, the buildup of literature, ideas, and support surrounding the promotion of Florentine grew to such an extent that by the time the decision had to be made in 1861, there were very few alternative candidates with as much potential. An example of the support that eventually led to Florentine’s success is Bembo’s writing in the Prose della volgar lingua.

The repositioning that Piedmont undertook was not simply a matter of taking sides—it was a declaration carved out with brutal political and social policy and colored by physical coercion. It began as I have mentioned briefly with Garibaldi’s landing at Bronte in 1860: in this first campaign, random executions of peasants, without formal sentencing or even investigation into their involvement in the riots, were common throughout the summer of 1860 (Astarita 285). The North’s adoption of such rhetoric which denounced the South as culturally closer to Africa than Europe, unfit for modernization, barbarous, and dangerous, suggests that the Piedmontese government was unable—and even unwilling—to search for the social causes of such unrest. Instead of questioning why the peasants revolted with such ferocity —burning down houses, kidnapping travelers, sacking villages—the North responded with increased force and brutality, much like other foreign rulers that had dominated the southern parts of the peninsula (Astarita 286). As Tommaso Astarita, a professor of history at Georgetown University, points out, by 1863, nearly, “one hundred thousand soldiers were fighting to

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18 Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, otherwise known as the Tre Corone.
19 This particular behavior was known as brigandage; it is a particular term used to describe the revolts by people who were considered subhuman, immoral, and uncivilized by the Northern government and society in general. The vocabulary and physical force used to suppress this behavior demonstrates the extent to which the North intentionally distanced itself from the South (Astarita 285-88).
restore order in the South,” and the rural warfare following Unification caused more
deaths than all other struggles between 1841 and 1860 (Astarita 286-87).

In addition to the physicality of the North’s suppression is the political and social
policy which it applied with equal force to the South: taxes bearing heavily on
agriculture—the primary economy in the South—and mandatory military conscription
plunged the South even further into poverty and debt. Astarita tells us that the profits
were then used to pay off war debts incurred during unification and help finance
infrastructure in the more prosperous North (Astarita 288). The policies very much
reflected the strengthened relationship between the northern industrial elites and the
southern landed nobility: poor land redistribution and continued practice of the
latifondi, large estates that employed landless laborers in conditions that were
strikingly similar to feudal times, continued to push the lower classes beyond their
limits (Astarita 288). In addition, age, literacy, and income requirements guaranteed
that only 8% of adult men would be able to vote, and even less in the impoverished
South (Astarita 287). In 1860, more than 80% of the population in the South was
illiterate; in 1911, 58% in Sicily, 70% in Calabria, and 65% in Basilicata were illiterate
(Astarita 285, 288).

As I have said, in order to recast itself in the image of a Northern European
power, Piedmont had to culturally separate itself from the South, of which the whole of
Italy was considered part. This was accomplished through the adoption of a preexisting
discourse on Southern European cultures, as held by Northern European powers; this
worked to deflect criticism of Piedmont, as a part of Italy, by projecting that criticism
onto its own south. The discourse and policy taken on brigandage by the Northern
government was the first form of internal othering that Italy experienced as a united
state. It is initially through this political process that the geographical north began
creating its South: a concept associated with a geographical terrain literally south of the northern territory but significantly more layered.\(^{20}\)

In order to describe the position and identity of the South, it is best to begin with its creation as such. We may first come to understand the South as the North’s object in a linguistic sense, where “I,” the subject acts upon “it,” the object. For example, in the sentence, “I do not like him,” the subject, “I,” retains all power over “him,” the direct object. Likewise, the “I,” in, “I am not like him,” retains the power of the self, the center of identification, that points to “him,” the other that is the periphery. Due to its complexity, it will be helpful to turn to some theorists whose studies revolve around the idea of the “Other.”

Julia Kristeva, in her text *Powers of Horror* (1982), seeks to describe the process and consequences of abjection; and, although she states explicitly that the abject is not an object, as the South may be conceived as, her discussion raises certain points in relation to the condition of the Other, object, South that are extremely important for our understanding. What is particular to the abject in Kristeva’s theory is its expulsion from the self, a negation of a part of the very being. Kristeva gives the example of feeling repulsed by the skin on top of the warm milk her parents tried to give her as a child; the milk, being from her parents’ perspective what would sustain and what ultimately would become little Kristeva, was physically abortive to Kristeva herself (Kristeva 2).

Similarly, the South as part of the Italian nation was abjected, expelled, from the main body of the Italian state. This process is most like a regulatory mechanism, one that controls and maintains the borders of the self. She goes on to suggest that, before we can construct ourselves in the image of what we aspire to be, we must first abject that

\(^{20}\)To make clear, south, with a lower case “s” is the cardinal direction as geographically below what is north; South, with a capital “S,” as well as North, are the constructed concepts and identities that emerge out of the othering dialectic.
which we do not wish to become, or even be associated with: “the mimesis, by means of which [one] becomes homologous to another in order to become [oneself], is in short logically and chronologically secondary,” to abjection (Kristeva 13). Speaking in relation to encountering a corpse, Kristeva elaborates on how the abject becomes the border on which the self teeters:

There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being... Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—
cadere, cadaver (Kristeva 3)

The self may not live to define itself without the abject. Similarly, as we have seen in Lacan’s mirror stage, the child must first learn to distinguish itself from other objects and people by using the term “I,” before it is able to join society (Lacan 94). In this way, the nation behaves in an extremely similar way to Lacan’s and Kristeva’s individual. In the Italian case, the Italian State, its cerebral and directing forces in the north, had first to abject the South as other before it could align itself with Northern Europe. The nature of this abjection, however, is not analogous to Kristeva’s original theory, wherein the abject and object do not meet. Instead, in Italy, the abjection—the imaginary expulsion of the southern territories as drastically different from and repugnant to the ruling North—also fused these territories together to create the South as the object of the North. In other words, the South does not occupy the space of the abject as the corpse does in Kristeva’s example. The corpse operates in a space of exception to the self’s conception of reality, it exists outside of the self’s power; whereas the South, as an object, still exists within the realm of the self, or subject, and is thus always under its domination. Piedmont’s decision to position itself like this, in relation to the South, at once had the effect of identifying the South as subordinate and weaker, but also morally as uncultivated and un-European. This relationship moved towards something similar
to an Orientalist relationship as defined by Edward Said, specifically in the way that the North romanticized the South while simultaneously establishing its cultural distance (Said).

What the abject and the Orientalist’s other have in common is the emergence of desire and fascination from within the self that follows along with the abhorrence and abjection; it is precisely because it is outside the self, outside the known and safe, that the abject/other becomes equally desirable. There is a difference between the desire for the other and the desire for the abject, however: in a relationship of Orientalism, the self’s desire for the other is much more apparent and is embedded in its description and representation of the other (Said). Whereas in Kristeva’s model of abjection, the desire for what has been abjected is neither apparent nor spoken of openly, but is rather a clandestine longing or unsure fascination. As we have seen earlier, the South has a long history of mystic appeal for the North, as is described in travel journals, novels, and artistic representations beginning in the 17th century (Moe 17).

What we are in fact seeing is a number of ways to create identity through the definition of boundaries. It is a cultural phenomenon that is then culturally continued through ideological leadership. As Mary Douglas points out in *Purity and Danger*, “where there is dirt, there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of systematic ordering and classification of matter in so far as ordering involves rejecting of inappropriate elements” (Douglas 44). In this excerpt, she is speaking about the classification of “dirt” as dependent on cultural perceptions as opposed to any objective “dirtiness;” but, her ideas of the cultural structuring of boundaries helps us to approach the reasons and methods of othering as seen in Italy in the 19th century and other historic periods—many of which have led to the formation of national identity and the development of the cultural itself.
What makes the Italian case so particular is that it embodies aspects of multiple interpolating binaries\(^{21}\) that usually take place between two different entities; however, Italy's self/other dialectic occurs within its own borders, as is the case with Europe on the whole. In his work, and particularly in his article, "Does Europe Have a South? An Essay on Borders" (2011) Roberto M. Dainotto, Professor of Italian and Literature at Duke University, discusses Europe's necessity to create an internal other:

The negativity of the south...was the necessary condition for all these Eurocentric theories of Europe. If Eurocentrism is the tendency to explain history 'without making recourse to anything outside of Europe' (Dussel 469–70), then Eurocentrism needs a figure of antithesis internal to Europe itself—it needs to posit a "south" as the negative moment in the dialectical progress of the Spirit of Europe (Dainotto 39)

In this article, Dainotto argues that Persia was the original Other of Europe in the Orientalist sense; however, over time Europe came to be so powerful and uncontested in its identity that it no longer needed a proper Other.\(^{22}\) Instead, as he suggests in the quote above, the concept of the other shifted to reflect a previous time in Europe's own past, and thus moved to the geographical south which was significantly less industrially developed: in this way, Europe could now see Persia as relating to a temporal position in its own history, what Dainotto calls “mutual recognition,” (Dainotto 48).\(^{23}\) With this shift, the socially marginal becomes symbolically central and then serves to reinforce

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\(^{21}\) By this I mean dialectics that create identity, that impart something other than a simple binary relationship, as is the case with relationships such as the Self/Other, Clean/Dirty, Cultivated/Primitive, etc.

\(^{22}\) In the article, Dainotto refers to Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* in which Montesquieu speaks from a generally held position for the time, what would today be considered an Orientalist perspective.

\(^{23}\) Dainotto further explains, “this *nomos* [norm]...internalizes all differences as its own exceptions, exceptions which confirm, as the saying goes, the universality of the norm: every "other"—Montesquieu's Asia, but in fact every conceptual “south”—becomes translation, "the same difference," mirror image of an internal south; and this internal south, in turn—from the times at least of positivist anthropology—becomes translation of all colonial differences in a vertiginous game of mirrors,” (Dainotto 49).
boundaries of the self. In Italy we see the exact same process of maintaining the individual self's boundaries by casting the internal other in increasingly negative light. The South is then always put in a negative position and never embodies its own positive identity: it is rather always the non-self. The socially marginal South became central to the North's definition of itself—it can only be itself, or the self that it wanted other European powers to see, if it had a negative referential to which it could be compared.

We should take pause here in order to reflect on the nature of the Italian South. As a concept, it encompasses and embodies a variety of negative identities—that of the other, the abject, the object, and the subaltern. These identities are negative because they come from outside of the entity to which they belong; that is, they are given rather than created from within. An example of this is the process of naming, which imparts an identity onto an individual to whom that name now belongs but one that was not created by the individual himself. However, the negation continues through the existence of these othered entities due to the relationship created between the naming subject and its named object. By casting a part of the country as South, by naming it as other, by objectifying it, the self or naming subject established its own power by taking it away from that which it points to: the South, other, object, or what may more easily be called the subaltern. As we have said, the process of abjection expels from within the subject’s own body that which, in Italy’s case, becomes the object; simultaneously, however, the now object is thrown out of hegemonic or ruling discourse, no longer to have a voice within dominant culture. Ultimately what this means for the South is an existence that is artificially created for it by the North because the North retains all power over discourse and all voices that can be voiced within hegemonic discourse.

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24 The South as other must necessarily be defined negatively, as that which the self is not, does not, so that the self can be described positively.
25 A concept we will come to later.
other words, the North now had the power to represent the South without any contestation from the South because the South had already been expelled from hegemonic society.26

The next step Italy took as a new nation to further reinforce its identity as a Northern entity was to wage war on Ethiopia in 1895, what could be considered a “traditional” Other.27 However, this act was just a physical expression of an ideological movement stemming from Piedmont’s goal. Before moving on, there must be a distinction made between borders and boundaries. Borders are simple lines of designation; they separate but do not confine. Boundaries, however, have the function of borders and separate entities, but they have the additional function of confining both to an identity as well as a territory; in this way, a boundary may be conceptual and physical. So, we can say that the South shares the same borders as Italy, but that its boundaries are severely restricted. What is more, by being bound to the identity of the South, southern Italians are not able to exercise their voices as such because the South has no place in the North, which dominates all discourse through hegemony. This idea of hegemony is central to understanding how the North has maintained such control and cultural regulation over the South. It has done so on many different levels—linguistically, politically, socially—but all can be traced to the cultural hegemony that began developing with the discussion of Florentine as Italy’s standard language.

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26 An idea we will come to in the next chapter.
27 One that is outside of one’s own borders and does not share a similar culture to one’s own; one that is foreign to the self.
Chapter Two: In Theory and Practice

(Hegemony, Intellectuals, and the Subaltern)

To better understand how the Italian North came to dominate the culture and all discourse about and in Italy, I turn to Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and its surrounding assumptions. Gramsci’s thought was and is historical in more than one way: first, when he analyzed the past, he was primarily concerned with how Italian society arrived at the position it found itself in when he was writing—a society dominated by Fascism; second, though he is thorough and takes great care to consider detailed observations, Gramsci is nevertheless a product of his academic and immediate environment; both instances of which create certain limitations in the application of his theory. By no means does this make them irrelevant or impractical for our investigation. In fact, it is quite the opposite as it was Gramsci who first developed the theory of what we would call cultural hegemony that was, as he saw it, implicit in Marxist theory. Therefore, it is particularly qualified to discuss the class issues that require both economic and social examination that arise out of Unification and continue to trouble Italy.

Gramsci was a student of Marxism before he even realized it. Coming from Sardinia, a marginalized island in his contemporary Italy despite its former connection with the Kingdom of Piedmont, and meeting with great difficulty during his youth and years of study, Gramsci was prone to see the inequalities produced by the Italian political system in light of class conflict. This was in part due to his exceptional intellect, especially as a child, which led him to realize the opportunities he had as well as those

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28 For a thorough account of Gramsci’s life, please see Giuseppe Fiori’s, Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary.
which he did not (Fiori 18). While studying at the University of Turin, Gramsci was exposed to a number of thinkers and philosophies but the one that was to impact his work the most, aside from Marx, was Hegel. The part of Hegel’s work that specifically informed Gramsci’s thought was his idea that reason propels man forward; that man progresses when he realizes the irrationality of his actions and then seeks to correct them in the light of reason. Gramsci believed that the lack of attention to the human element, something that was central to Hegel’s thought, was a serious miscalculation in Marxist theory and was ultimately the reason why Communism had not yet been realized. Furthermore, Gramsci believed the unification of European culture culminated in Hegelianism and its critiques, and that Marxism was only possible as the next necessary step after the “disintegration” of Hegelianism (Gramsci Prison 417).

His theory of hegemony, as it is born out of a relationship between practice and knowledge, can only be understood through its parts and their functions within the greater machine. Remember the analogy of the newsroom from the previous chapter: the system of hegemony may be seen as the actual printing machine which is, if one hasn’t seen a press before, quite indescribable in that its appearance does not immediately suggest its function. It is only when we see the movable type settings, the gears which force them to print, and the final product that we can tell how it functions and what its purpose is. Hegemony must be approached in the same way, by looking at its parts, how it comes to be a functional entity, before we can come to a full

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29 Gramsci speaks specifically about how his fluency in standard Italian gave him a significant advantage in school over the other children who spoke dialect or at best very poor Italian. An issue we will address later on.
30 This particular point is made by a number of theorists to suggest a reason for why Gramsci’s thought turned in this way: because his political career came after the failure of many Communist revolutions, his thought was always geared toward how to fix the problem with the system (Gramsci Reader, Gramsci Prison).
31 In other words, Hegelianism is an essential part of Marxism, without which Marxism would not exist nor function properly.
32 See chapter one, page 3.
understanding. In addition to this, Gramsci’s theories are not necessarily consistent throughout and terms are often used in different and varying ways; therefore, I have privileged one definition of hegemony that I believe is consistent and appropriate for our use here.

It must first be noted that, though Gramsci sought to expound on Marxist theory, he was nevertheless a student of Marxism and hence was faithful to his ideas about historical materialism. Using the nation as the example, he describes a given society as having a structure or base, what Marx would describe as the forces of production; in this way Marx also privileges economic-material movements as opposed to intellectual or social phenomena. What is built out from and on top of the base is the superstructure, Marx’s relations of production. Unlike Marx, though, Gramsci believes that the superstructure can greatly affect change in the base itself despite its being born out of said structure. As we will see, Gramsci’s superstructure is a lot like Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser). In Gramsci as well as Marx, a social group may come to dominate all others by gaining direct control over the forces of production; in the capitalist society, this control is maintained by the bourgeoisie who own and maintain these forces (factories, resources, etc.).

The proletariat and the peasantry are then obviously excluded from power or even discussions of power and are subject to exploitation at the hands of the capitalists (managers, owners, etc.). Any group that is marginalized outside the hegemonic power, that does not take part in the dominant culture, may be defined as subaltern according to Gramsci’s original use of the term. In its fully realized power, the dominant class will then maintain the conditions which made its ascension possible—i.e. not allowing

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33 One definition Gramsci gives follows as: "subaltern, [that] which has not yet gained consciousness of its strength, its possibilities, of how it is to develop, and which therefore does not know how to escape from the primitivist phase," (Gramsci Reader 210). Gramsci also mentions a "subaltern character," indicating possible value placement on subaltern groups in general (Gramsci Reader 336).
the other social classes the opportunity to come to consciousness and thus power—
while also increasing its own power through education and control of the State. A note
about socio-economic classes: I will often refer to the classes that are not in power as
“lower” for two reasons. The first being historically financial in that dominant classes
tend to be wealthier than other contesting groups. The second is both social and
financial: there is a correlation within Marxism between social status and economic
wealth which calls for less wealthy and thus less culturally respected classes to be
considered in this terminology as “lower” in comparison to those classes that are
socially esteemed. This may seem inconsequential as we are more used to this idea, but
that is the very point—the reason we are so used to it is because it has happened
successively in history up to this point. It is this succession that both Gramsci and Marx
hope to overcome, Gramsci specifically through the added element of human sentient
consciousness.34

Gramsci breaks down the power of the dominant class into two types, what he
calls political society and civil society (Gramsci *Prison* 12). Political society, what is
identified as the State, consists of the laws, the system of rewards and punishments and
the physical enforcement that is associated with those laws; the State functions
primarily through coercion (Femia 24).35 Civil society is the, “intellectual and moral
leadership”—direzione intellettuale e morale—that issues from the dominant class and
which the people willingly consent to though not necessarily consciously. In other
words, it is the conception of the world as seen by the dominant group that is then

34 It is a consciousness of both the intellectuals and the workers that Gramsci wanted because he didn’t
think it would work without the intellectuals understanding the workers’ perspective and conception of
reality.
35 It should be noted that in the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci often designates different definitions of the
State, sometimes as it being a combination of civil society and political society, other times as being solely
political. I have chosen to rely on the latter definition because it seems more consistent with his other
theories, e.g. that in Italy there was a State and domination without true hegemony.
promulgated imperceptibly through civic institutions such as schools, associations, and religious gatherings, thus influencing the lower classes, making ruling significantly easier for the class in power (Femia 24). This imperceptible influence constitutes hegemony; so, if a social group has a hegemonic rule, it sets the standard for the rest of society in such aspects of life as morality, values, ideology, perceptions of reality. This occurs as an effect of assumed prestige, which we will discuss later. If this form of ideological control does not function as it is meant to, the dominant class must resort to its other source of power, physical coercion.\textsuperscript{36} Hegemony is an unintentional creation of the relations of production of a given historical epoch and is thus specific to that society, historical period, and class in power. Hegemonic rule also, by virtue of its existence, denotes a control of the forces of production, though this control does not itself equate to hegemonic rule. A class that only dominates the economy may not be said to have hegemony over society; it is only when a class exercises social prestige and ideological leadership that it secures its power as hegemonic. Additionally, once a class has attained this level of influence, its power is self-perpetuating. As such, it may be considered cultural leadership—the establishment of norms for all situations and cases in a given society.

There are a number of unresolved questions that come out of this theory, such as whether or not the dominant class reflects on its hegemonic control and, if so, if it intentionally uses it to provoke the desired outcome in the lower classes? While Gramsci explicitly states that, "ideologies for the governed are mere illusions, a deception to which they are subject, while for the governing they constitute a willed and a knowing deception," there are other theorists dealing with the same or similar theories of power relations, such as Althusser, who do not believe this is something that

\textsuperscript{36}This is called a “crisis of authority” (Gramsci \textit{Prison} 210).
may consciously be realized in the act (Gramsci *Reader* 196). As we will see, the complexity of the power structures at play in any society is such that it is difficult to imagine anyone let alone an entire social group being conscious enough to recognize and further to utilize this power in an intentionally effective way. If it were intentionally constructed rather than organically rising from the relations of production, it would take a mass concerted effort on the part of the dominant group in order to convince a mass double or triple its size that it is what the dominant class truly believes. It any case, it is debatable but is not necessarily crucial to our investigation—in either case, the power of hegemony is such that it will continue to be a method of suppression regardless of whether those in control know it or not.

Another issue that is raised is the different types of hegemony. This argument, proposed by Joseph Femia in his text, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (1981), suggests that there are three different kinds of hegemony that correspond to the ways in which each was brought about. What he calls “integral hegemony” is rather the best scenario for the class in power: in this society, the lower classes pose little to no resistance to the hegemonic power because it is so thoroughly entwined in their own interests, which is to say that the ruling class appears to carry the lower classes forward as they move themselves forward (Femia 46-47). This contrasts with the second form, “decadent hegemony,” in which the “bourgeois economic dominance is no longer capable of furthering everyone’s interests” and, “the mentality of the masses are not truly in harmony with the dominant ideas,” (Femia 47). It should be noted that in any case, the true interests of the subaltern classes are not actually in harmony with those of the dominant class; it is rather that the subaltern believes the ruling class has its interests in mind when in fact it does not. This belief by the subaltern in the dominant class is rather an illusion produced by the hegemony of the dominant class. In a decadent hegemonic
system, the subaltern may be seen as being closer to consciousness, closer to realizing their exploitation and subjugation by the ruling class and by this hegemony. The type that is most relevant for our investigation is the third, most fragile and volatile, called, “minimal” hegemony. It is most volatile because it is the last step before the realization of consciousness in the working class. In this case, as was the case with Italy during the Risorgimento, the dominant group actively sought to shut out the popular classes from all State activity. To further inhibit any organized opposition, the ruling class would absorb cultural, political, intellectual, and economic leaders from the lower classes into their own, thus “decapitating” the popular element (Femia 47-48).

While decapitation is used as an illustrative metaphor in Gramsci’s work, this action of enlisting intellectual leaders from the popular masses and thus removing them from their organic class did in fact cut off the intellect that could very well have led the proletariat and peasantry to consciousness. Gramsci refers to this process of absorption as trasformismo (Femia 48, Gramsci Prison 58). While there is still cultural influence at play in a situation of minimal hegemony, it only truly affects the bourgeois class and rather subjects the lower classes to a form of dictatorship with extremely low ideological integration, which is to say a State reliant on coercion (Femia 49). Here we can see how Gramsci may have believed in multiple different kinds of “States”—one extreme in which hegemonic rule is strong and close to fully integrated in the lower classes, another where this integration is shunned and the power is kept explicitly elitist, with positions of gradation in between.38

37 “Il cosi detto ‘trasformismo’ non è che l’espressione parlamentare del fatto che il Partito d’Azione viene incorporato molecularmente dai moderati e le masse popolari vengono decapitate, non assorbite nell’ambito del nuovo Stato,” (Gramsci Risorgimento 122).
38 This idea is thought out in Gramsci’s work, Risorgimento, and is also discussed in fuller detail in Femia’s work, Gramsci’s Political Thought (1981).
The place of the intellectual is both highly regarded in Gramsci’s theory but also severely scrutinized as it is the intellectual who has the power to both liberate the subaltern classes and enslave them. In this way, the intellectual as a concept is invaluable to Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and must be understood as fully as possible. What distinguishes his idea of an intellectual from others is that it is non-exclusionary—he believes that all men are intellectuals in that there exists a creative intellect in everyone, even in those who perform the most menial tasks. To a certain degree, this indicates his faith in the proletariat and maybe even the peasantry:

> Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher', an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. (Gramsci *Prison 9*)

That is not to say that everyone functions as an intellectual, though. This concept of function in the intellectual applies to all other roles within a “complex of social relations,” and therefore greatly informs his overall theory (Gramsci *Prison 8*). Even though the “traditional” intellectual and the worker both have the ability to think and contribute to a particular conception of the world, the traditional intellectual is the only one whose function it is to inform that reality and promulgate it.

The particular function of a given intellectual depends on where he falls on the class-ideological line. If he realizes the exploitative nature of capitalism and wishes to change it, his function is to help the worker come to consciousness of this fact. This, Gramsci believes, is the function of the Communist Party as a whole. However, this comes as a quality of the party rather than the individuals who make up that party in
that no matter what function an individual performed before, once assumed by the party, his function will be change to reflect the party's function, as will his efforts. Gramsci gives us an example of an industrialist and a peasant who come into the party not to, “produce more at a lower cost, nor...to learn new methods of cultivation,” but rather in order to play a, “directive and organisational” role as an intellectual of the Party (Gramsci Prison 16). Gramsci does not say explicitly that it is only the Communist Party that should act like this but it can be inferred that he did not believe any other political party had the same intention—or capacity—to do so, based on his zealous efforts to realize a strong Communist Party in Italy. If the intellectual either does not realize the reality of the contradictions in society or does not seek to change them, then he is part of the dominant class in that he reinforces the hegemonic power by taking part in and facilitating the exposure of that particular ideology through his work.

But if everyone is an intellectual, what exactly does it mean to be one? Thus far, we have focused on their function but their essence is equally important. It should be noted that, despite how intellectuals appear to exist outside of socio-economic divisions, they are nevertheless part of particular classes and are brought into creation with the birth of that particular class: “every social class together with itself creates one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and awareness of its own function,” economically, politically, and socially (Gramsci Prison 5). As we have seen, their function necessarily places them in a part of the whole structure, whether that is towards the top with the dominant class or closer to the bottom with the workers, thus there are many strata of intellectuals even within a single class.

Gramsci distinguished two types in particular: the traditional intellectual and the organic intellectual. The former is professionally regarded as a thinker in any field that may be: science, literature, philosophy, etc. (Gramsci Prison 3). He is one that does
intellectual activity for a living and as his social function; these are only found in the upper classes of society. The definition of the organic intellectual is slightly more nuanced with many more conditions in place. An organic intellectual is someone who is born, as everyone is, from a particular socio-economic class but does not leave that class to be educated in a university or otherwise; in fact, education outside of his socio-economic class, or rather his social function, precludes him from being an organic intellectual (Gramsci Prison 6). The organic intellectual is instead a specialist of whatever social function he has in that he performs that function but is also acutely aware of the mentality with which the whole class operates; he is then able to articulate the class’s experiences and grievances to a traditional intellectual (Gramsci Prison 6).

He, more so than his traditional counterpart, is more defined by his function of directing the ideas and aspirations of the class than his occupation. It is the organic intellectual who will be guided by the Party to become the leaders of the working class and thus to bring them to consciousness (Gramsci Prison 4).

The concept of contradictions in society is important to note here. Again coming back to Marx’s and even before him to Hegel’s philosophy, contradictions in society arise when the self-image of the society, posited by the dominant class, does not reflect

39 The difference between “job” or “occupation” and “function:” an occupation is individual and informs an individual’s function, but the function is necessarily social and has consequences beyond the individual and beyond the class. An individual’s occupation may be a mechanic, but his social function is entwined with the functioning of the proletariat. The traditional intellectual’s occupation is to think and give consciousness to his organic class; since his work is necessarily informed by his social class, the ideas his work promulgates are filtered through the bourgeois conception of reality. Whole classes, however, also have functions universal to the class.

40 There is also a difference between class and function, even though they are very closely linked. A particular social function is unique to a given occupation but is determined by social class. If we take the intellectual again as our example, in the case of the party intellectual his job is to bring awareness to the workers, not the bourgeoisie. Function is first determined by occupation but is often conditioned upon class. In other words, the traditional intellectual has as his function the spreading of knowledge but is only able to do so because he is part of the bourgeois class.

41 Gramsci says explicitly that even though other classes draw intellectuals from the peasantry, the peasantry cannot have an organic intellectual because once educated outside of the class, he is no longer associated with that class.
the whole of the society. Gramsci hopes to eliminate this condition of society through the philosophy of praxis, which is explained emphatically across his texts. He describes it as:

the theory of those contradictions [itself]. It is not an instrument of government of dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over subaltern classes; it is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even unpleasant ones, and in avoiding deceptions (impossible) by the ruling class and even more by themselves.” (Gramsci Reader 196-197)

What distinguishes the philosophy of praxis from other superstructures is that it seeks to unify “practical movement and theoretical thought” or tries to unite, “through a struggle that is both theoretical and practical,” (Gramsci Prison 417). In this statement, the struggle is of course between classes but more importantly it is the struggle for the workers’ consciousness which in turn will allow them to rise above the bourgeoisie and claim the forces of production. It is about making knowledge available to all of society—not reserving it for intellectuals—that will modify “popular thought and mummified popular culture” (Gramsci Prison 417).

The intellectual has an intimate relationship with this practice because it is only through the functioning of the intellectual that integration between philosophy and practice may occur due to the intellectual’s function. This action must be done dialogically, through conversation rather than lecture, so that the party intellectuals may come to understand the workers’ perspective and reality; this will allow the Party

42 We are given the example of the first democracy in Greece, in which those who were able to take part in the democracy—wealthy older men—saw the society as being “free” when in fact a good majority of the people in that society were quite the opposite.
to better articulate the knowledge they have of the hegemonic power to the workers. Gramsci himself practiced this method by hosting town hall meetings with factory works in order discuss, share, and plan in a more “organic” way. But Gramsci goes further than that and suggests that intellectuals misguidedly believe that they can function without understanding or “feeling the elementary passions of the people;” this is impossible, he says, because their job is to be able to place these feelings and thus conceptions of the world in the particular historical situation and bring the popular element to knowledge through the dialectical process of the struggle (Gramsci Prison 418). This process of organic cohesion, “in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge,” is absolutely necessary to the realization of shared life (Gramsci Prison 418). It is for this reason that Gramsci insists on a dialogic relationship between the political party and the proletariat.

What is equally bound up in these opposing conceptions of the world is language and culture. Language for Gramsci is an historical study, as in the idea that every dialect and language is born out of the forces of production in a given epoch (Gramsci Cultural 174). In this way, language is equally integrated with and gives form to the mentality of a given class; it is a tool with which we assign meaning in order to create our world. As such, language also has the power to confine that world. In Gramsci’s eyes, dialect and folklore, the language and conception of reality, are necessarily determined by the society from which they come and are valued as such. He states explicitly:

Folklore should instead be studied as a ‘conception of the world and life’ implicit to a large extent in determinate (in time and space) strata of society and in opposition...to ‘official’ conceptions of the world (or in a

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43 This is another complicated term in Gramsci. Here I am referring, as he often does, to the knowledge of the hegemonic system.
broader sense, the conceptions of the cultured parts of historically determinate societies) that have succeeded one another in the historical process. (Gramsci Cultural 189)

In other words, societies that are more modern have more elaborated forms of language and ways of viewing reality; since the most modern society is the one that is most progressed and comes later than all other societies historically, any others existing before that point are insufficient and outdated (Gramsci Cultural 189). Almost like technology in the way we think of it today, as soon as the newest model is released, the previous generation becomes obsolete. In the new proletariat hegemony, ideally all conceptions of the world and dialects would be subsumed to create a universal hegemony. Until that point, however, the state must strive to bring all people to the level of the most modern society. In describing the function of the state, Gramsci explains:

[The] formative activity of the state, which is expressed particularly in the education system, as well as in political activity generally, does not work upon and fill up a blank slate. In reality, the state competes with and contradicts other explicit and implicit conceptions, and folklore is not among the least significant and tenacious of these; hence it must be ‘overcome.’ (Gramsci Cultural 191)

Gramsci urges the teaching of folklore to teachers so that they may recognize other conceptions of the world and be better prepared to “uproot them replace them with conceptions that are deemed to be superior,” (Gramsci Cultural 191).\textsuperscript{44} In the same way, he urges the normative teaching of standard Italian language in schools so as to raise the popular masses out of dialect and into Italian. In 1865, only 2.5% of the population

\textsuperscript{44} Gramsci suggests that this process might look something like the Reformation in Protestant countries: “An activity of this kind, thoroughly carried out, would correspond on the intellectual plane to what the Reformation was in Protestant countries,” (Gramsci Cultural 191).
spoke Italian and yet, in 1923, a new Education Act passed abolished normative teaching practices of Italian with the idea that language should be expressive and individual. (Gramsci Cultural 165). This effectively reinforced class distinctions and condemned children of the working class and peasantry to illiteracy and dialect—to a world without escape or access to hegemonic culture.

The drive behind universal teaching of the standard language for Gramsci, as was his goal with all reforms that he proposed, was to reconcile the different levels of society, “so that the separation between modern culture and popular culture of folklore will disappear,” (Gramsci Cultural 191). He believed that once a hegemonic language was established, children of all classes would gradually adopt it simply through exposure, but that the process could be obviously sped up if schools were also places of exposure; this is partially why the role of the intellectual is so important to the formation of the new hegemony. The way in which Gramsci saw language move through society, he also saw hegemony.

Gramsci understood language to work in the way his professor at the University of Turin, Matteo Giulio Bartoli, had described it: as radiating from a cultural center outwards toward the peripheral areas (Gramsci Cultural 164). Bartoli, belonging to the Italian school of “neolinguistics” in the early 20th century, held that language change was the process by which, “a dominant speech community exerted prestige over contiguous subordinate communities: the city over the surrounding countryside, the ‘standard’ language over the dialect,” (Gramsci Cultural 164). Franco Lo Piparo in his Lingua, intelletttuali, egemonia in Gramsci (1979) suggests that this model of prestige greatly influenced Gramsci in the development of his theory of hegemony. He holds that:

Gramsci conceived of the relations between intellectuals and the people, between a hegemonic culture and a subaltern culture, in substantially the
same way as neolinguistics had described the relations between areas—as relations of direction through the exercise of prestige securing active consent rather than as relations of domination by coercion and passive consent. (Gramsci *Cultural* 164)

Neither Piparo nor Gramsci say what causes one form of language or ideology to become the most prestigious; however, it can be inferred that both coincide with the dominant class in power which, as we know, claims this power along with the forces of production. The ideas and beliefs of the class in power are diffused throughout society through the means of the State institutions, such as schools and laws, as well as in social and cultural products such as films, newspapers, literature, and announcements. These outlets are significantly more present in the city centers and become more scarce as one moves toward the periphery; however, that does not mean the hegemonic culture does not reach there, only that it takes more time to get there.
Chapter Three: Resistance through Literature

Gramsci’s work seeks to raise the inadequacies of social structure to a height visible to all, pushing social thought towards skepticism and critique, and hopes to aid the search for solutions. His intentions were undoubtedly good, yet the outcomes, or even expected outcomes, are unfortunately unarticulated and lack solid footing. This is not for want of thorough thought or consideration, for we know now how Gramsci labored over these theories and did in fact try to put them into practice; however, his ideas are no more absolute than the power of the bourgeoisie and are thus themselves subject to skepticism and critique.

What is so attractive about the philosophy of praxis is its attachment to practice and reality; it overtly seeks the material as a necessary component to its theory. Yet this is precisely one of its weakest points: Marxism is continually being criticized for its lack of realized accomplishments or even hard, detailed explanations of what could happen should the precise historical moment arise. Likewise, in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, we miss that vital practicality that it so desperately desires, i.e. there is no real image of the new hegemony or given examples of how hegemony works. Despite these possible limitations, I would like to raise the possibility of resolution in concrete cultural examples, specifically with two literary texts that explicitly take the South as their subject. By putting Gramsci’s theory of hegemony into question through these works of literature, we may realize how resistance to Northern hegemony may or may not be possible through the cultural work of two different perspectives. In addition, we may test the applicability of Gramsci’s theory to the multifaceted questions concerning cultural divisions in Italy.

The first text, I Malavoglia (1881), was written by Giovanni Verga during his time in Milan and focuses on a peasant fishing village in Sicily (Ferroni 3: 414). The second,
Cristo si è fermato a Eboli (1945), was written by Carlo Levi about his exile in Basilicata in the south of Italy. These texts offer two very different perspectives on the South and on the socio-political circumstances surrounding the discourse on the South. The first thing that should be noted is the difference in genre: Verga's text is a novel, while Levi's is a memoir. However, each approaches the line of reality to a similar degree. Verga, as will be discussed, goes to great lengths to capture with the utmost objectivity the essence of the characters he describes by observing real fishing villages in the south. Levi's text is in fact a memoir, but was written nearly ten years after his return to the north, making it less credible than if it had been written during his stay. The veracity of memoir as a genre is itself a continuing question that must also be kept in mind during this discussion. By placing both texts into dialogue with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, I hope to resolve, and raise, some issues within the theory as well as in the texts themselves.

Giovanni Verga is a proper Italian author. At this point in our discussion, it should be established that the Italian literary tradition is incredibly strong and exclusive. By a “proper” Italian author, I do not mean to say that Verga’s work is necessarily better than anyone else’s, nor are the works of other authors that have been crystalized in the Italian canon. However, the distinction that allowed for those works to be canonized should not be overlooked; it is because they pressed the literary form further into new territories, new ways of perception, new functions, that they are lauded as classics. The cannon is fixed in a certain point and is then swept forward by innovative authors, like Verga. The terms “fixed,” “crystalized,” and “proper,” to describe the Italian canon, and others like “swept,” “forward,” and “further,” to describe more modern forms of literature along the chronological literary timeline is not unintentional. I want to convey the particularity with which Italian literature defines by itself; that is,
while Levi is arguably a very vivid and elegant writer, he teeters on the fringes on the cannon while Verga has a secured position within it given the result of his work, i.e. that it pushed the public in new directions and forced them to see witness things they were not used to seeing. It is true, the novel, *I Malavoglia*, which is privileged in this discussion, was not an immediate success. In fact, it was quite openly disliked by the majority of the reading public, specifically the bourgeois class, when it was first published in 1881 (Lane 1). Verga’s public acclaim rather came three years later with his stage adaptation of his short story *Cavalleria Rusticana* (Ferroni 3: 416).

Verga was born in September 1840 in Catania, or possibly in a country village neighboring Catania where his family used to vacation (Ferroni 3: 414, McWilliam 6). In this time, to be historical was to be patriotic; that is, if a text spoke about the past, it spoke of the struggle for the nation, for unity and liberty. The generation before Verga read the great work of Manzoni and saw the chaos leading up to Unification; in this fervor, the hope for a peaceful and successful State post-Unification was gushing from the literary works of the time.\(^45\) This style was at once Romantic, historical, and patriotic—*storico-patriottici* as Giulio Ferroni, a lauded Italian literary historian, refers to it (Ferroni 3: 418). At the start of his literary career, Verga was also infused with patriotic spirit, as was reflected in his earlier works.\(^46\) Verga studied law at the University of Catania, a profession his family of *piccola nobiltà*\(^47\) had ushered him into but for which he did not have any particular passion. With the death of his father in 1863, Verga joined Garibaldi’s *guardia nazionale* which had the task of maintaining the

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\(^{45}\) The work by Manzoni, such as *I promessi sposi*, and that of Giacomo Leopardi’s characterizes the Romantic period of Italian literature.

\(^{46}\) Such as *Amore e patria*, *I carbonari della montagna* and *Sulle lagune* (Ferroni 3: 414).

\(^{47}\) Literally translates to “little nobility,” however, this description does not suggest little wealth but rather nearing royal standing, what we might call petty nobility. The Vergas nevertheless were considered upper class citizens in their time.
newly formed Italian state under Vittorio Emmanuale (Ferroni 3: 414). He began writing for a magazine while still in service and, after moving first to Florence, eventually moved to Milan in 1872 where he stayed for roughly twenty years (Ferroni 3: 414).

In the wake of Unification, however, what was once patriotic and noble sputtered to a halt and from the decaying corpse of Romanticism leaked realism, what would later be called verismo in the Italian tradition. Very much like French naturalism that had taken off just prior to Verga’s endeavors into verismo, in which he was the first Italian author, it focuses on the everyday activities and character of ordinary people (McWilliam 11). Like many artists and people of the time, Verga became restless and eventually dissatisfied with the romanticized depiction of his world, and instead converted toward a more realistic, arguably more pessimistic, perspective. This perspective took the form of blunt objectivity, a narrative spassionato in which the author’s opinions, style, and hand would not interfere with the reality a text was representing. Verga speaks about his methodology for this new form of novel in his story written in the form of a letter, L’amante di Gramigna (1880):


The first text to exemplify this methodology is Nedda, the first novella in a compelling compilation of short stories focusing on the local, popular life of the lower classes and peasantry of Sicily; these texts are characterized by a form of writing Verga established

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48 Please see Ferroni v. 3 for more biographical information on Verga.  
49 “dispassionate” (translation mine).  
50 “The artwork will seem to be done by itself, to have matured and to be spontaneous, like a natural fact, without retaining any point of contact with its author, any mark of original sin” (translation mine).  
51 Nedda (1874) is considered Verga’s first verismo text (McWilliam 12).
in this compilation called prosa dialogata (McWilliam 11). As he does in I Malavoglia, Verga uses a great deal of dialogue in order to give the characters as much room to create and tell their own story rather than telling it for them through narration. Again speaking to the addressee in L’amante di Gramigna, Verga states, “e tu veramente preferirai di trovarti faccia a faccia col fatto nudo e schietto, senza stare a cercarlo fra le linee del libro, attraverso la lente dello scrittore,” (Verga Vita 155). What he accomplishes with this style of writing is well demonstrated in the last lines of Nedda, the final scene in which her child dies of malnutrition:

Nedda la scosse, se la strinse al seno con impeto selvaggio, tentò di scaldarla coll’alito e coi baci, e quando s’accorse ch’era proprio morta, la depose sul letto dove avea dormito sua madre, e le s’inginocchiò davanti, cogli occhi asciutti e spalancati fuor di misura. ‘Oh ! benedette voi che siete morte !’ esclamò. ‘Oh benedetta voi, Vergine Santa! che mi avete tolto la mia creatura per non farla soffrire come me! (Verga “Nedda” 71)

This particular scene, as is the case with the whole of the text, is meant to be a doorway into another world, into the brutally sharp reality of peasant struggles. What must be realized about this particular doorway, however, is that it does not act to connect two worlds; it is not the threshold between our bourgeois reality and their peasant one. The doorway itself is rather constructed as it would be if it were of the world it seeks to open. In other words, although Verga is writing from an outside perspective—because he is both aristocratic and educated, and thus aligns more closely with the Northern perspective despite his Sicilian heritage—he writes in the language of the world he is representing, using its vocabulary, its idioms, and its ideas. It should be kept in mind

52 “And you will really prefer to find yourself face-to-face with naked and blunt fact, without standing to search for it between the lines of the book, through the lens of the writer” (translation mine).
that despite his ambition of minimizing the effect of authorial style on the text, there
nevertheless exist authorial design and hand that shapes the contours of the text. A note
about Verga’s position in relation to Sicilian society and class: it is true that he is born in
Catania, or close by, was raised there, and eventually moved back there as an older man;
however, it is not only his place of birth geographically that defines him but his place
socially and economically. Because he was born into a wealthy family, attended a
university, which would automatically sever any intrinsic, organic, relationship he had
with the lower classes, and then continued his study of literature in Florence and Milan,
Verga became part of the hegemonic culture. It is because he had a part and a voice in
the hegemony of the upper classes that he cannot be associated with the South as an
intellectual of any sort—neither traditional nor organic—according to Gramsci. He
would instead be considered, in Gramscian terms, a Northern artist or writer.53

Verga first addresses the reader in a Proemio that precedes the literary text; it
states explicitly what he intends to accomplish in I Malavoglia, his methodology and
thoughts on this kind of endeavor, and then outlines the remainder of his project to
follow. This project, entitled I Vinti,54 was intended to be a series of five novels
beginning with I Malavoglia that take as their subjects each level of society, respectively,
so as to trace the stream of ambition that runs through humanity, “dall’umili pescatore
al nuovo arricchito,” (Verga Proemio 5).55 Verga describes I Malavoglia as:

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\text{lo studio sincero e spassionato del come probabilmente devono nascere e} \\
\text{svilupparsi nelle più umili condizioni, le prime irrequietudini pel benessere;} \\
\text{e quale perturbazione debba arrecare in una famigliu la vissuta fino allora}
\]

53 This interpretation comes mainly out of Gramsci’s emphasis on social function: because Verga does not
function as an intellectual, he may not be considered as such. However, my second point is that Verga’s
Southern heritage does not make him akin to an organic intellectual, or even an organic author, because
of his later association and schooling in the Northern hegemonic system.
54 “The Defeated Ones” (McWilliam).
55 “from the humblest fishermen to the newly enriched” (translation mine).
The novel takes place in Aci Trezza, a small village on the outskirts of Catania, Sicily, in the early 1860’s. Due to the recent unification of the Italian State, an obligatory conscription law and higher taxes are put in place and applied uniformly to all territories under King Vittorio Emanuele. With Unification also came telegraph wires and railroads, two pieces of progress that had not yet reached Sicily. The title is the surname of one of the oldest families of that village, the Malavoglia, and the novel does in fact hover around their comforts and misfortunes; however, the reader is able to glean much about the other village inhabitants as well as their perspectives on the Malavoglia, society, and the changing environment. While there are many village characters who have significant parts in the story's development, the narrative is primarily concerned with Padron 'Ntoni, La Longa—his daughter in law—and his grandchildren, 'Ntoni, Mena, Luca, Alessi, and Lia. The Malavoglia family begin their collapse into debilitating poverty and hopelessness after a deal between Padron 'Ntoni and zio Crocifisso results in the death of Padron 'Ntoni’s son and begins their indebtedness to the unforgiving money lender.

In describing his project and intentions in the Proemio, Verga—consciously or not, it is unclear—aligns himself with the antagonists, or supposed antagonists, of the novel; the very pessimistic view of progress, ambition, and struggle, and its effects on humanity which he presents here before the text has even begun, is the exact same argument that the more well-off neighbors in Aci Trezza use against the Malavoglia

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56 “This story is the honest and dispassionate study of the way in which the first strivings after well-being might possibly be born, and develop, among the humblest people in society; it is an account of the sort of disquiet visited upon a family (which had lived relatively happily until that time) by the vague desire for the unknown, the realization that they are not well-off, or could do better” (Verga Proemio).
when they try to escape their dire position. This is not the only suggestion of Verga’s biases that we find in the *Proemio*:

*Il movente dell’attività umana che produce la fiumana del progresso è preso qui alle sue sorgenti, nelle proporzioni più modeste e materiali. Il meccanismo delle passioni che la determinano in quelle basse sfere è meno complicato, e potrà quindi osservarsi con maggior precisione* (Verga *Proemio* 3)

Verga’s use of certain terms, such as, “più modeste e materiali,” “basse sfere,” and “meno complicato,” evoke the feeling of ethnographic discovery, of returning to the source of some otherwise unexplainable phenomenon; he even uses the word, “sorgenti.” But there is more to this than simple discovery, because in a way that is exactly what he says he will do in this text: he calls it an objective study of this group of people for a particular purpose. The terminology, however, denotes an intentional separation between himself and his “subject,” one that takes the guise of objectivity but is rather judgment, something that he later says not even the observer has the right to do (Verga *Proemio* 5). By referring to this social class as the “basse sfere,” and “meno complicato,” he, probably unintentionally, positions every other class that is not represented in *I Malavoglia* as higher, more cultivated, and generally more advanced than what he studies here in this realm. Later on in the preface, Verga comments on the language differences between “civiltà” and this level of society, suggesting that in civilized societies, i.e. not Aci Trezza, language is more complicated and reflects many more

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57 “The mainspring for the human activity which produces the stream of progress is here viewed at its source, at its humblest and most down-to-earth. The mechanism of the passions which are vital to such progress in these low realms is less complicated, and can thus be observed with greater accuracy,” (Verga *Proemio*).

58 “most modest and raw”, “base spheres”, “less complicated” (translation mine).

59 “Springs” or “sources” (translation mine).

60 “Civilization” (translation mine).
emotions, possibilities, and thought processes (Verga Proemio). We can see that Verga, like Gramsci, may believe the peasantry is unelaborated, defined and confined by their language and beliefs; that they are inhibited from accessing abstractions, such as artificiality, by their socio-economic and, consequently, cultural situation. This situation is then manifested in their mentality and reality. As has been suggested by such theorists as Jack Goody, Ian Watt, and Walter J. Ong, literacy and the use of written language allows for advanced forms of thought processes such as thinking abstractly and even the ability to critique the veracity of something (Goody). This is in contrast to oral societies—societies in which oral communication is the preferred or only form of communication—which, it has been argued, do not have the capability to compare accounts of the same event since there is no written records, and thus are not able to see or note differences; this supposedly inhibits them from reaching the point of skepticism and eventually critique. As we will see later on, Aci Trezza bears a great deal of similarity to an oral society; while it is not made explicit whether or not the majority of people are literate, the reader is led to believe that there is at least a significant portion of the town that cannot read.

Given this context, Verga’s words in the Proemio not only have the ring of a primitive-cultivated binary perspective, but that reverberating semblance is only heard so clearly because of the temporal and even spatial difference Verga creates simply through word choice. By positioning himself as the observer, necessarily taken out of that society—or even alien to that society—and then juxtaposing that society with another, one he regards even implicitly as higher or more cultivated, Verga acts as an ethnographer by distinguishing these two groups from one another. The suggestion of civilization denotes a progression in time, thus relegating Aci Trezza to the past, as well as situating it squarely in the geographical South. What is still more problematic, and
quite common with literature describing the South, is its tendency to characterize the entire South as Aci Trezza; as if every community not situated in a metropole is equally as low, uncultivated, and inarticulate as Verga supposed Aci Trezza to be.

There is a shift in position when we go to the actual text that is very much driven by the positioning of the reader. In the Proemio, because of the way Verga positions and privileges the observer and his role and function, the reader is necessarily aligned with Verga in this position for being otherwise would mean being unaware and common (Verga Proemio 5). So it would seem that as readers, we are to accept the author’s perspective on this situation and these characters in I Malavoglia because of his privileged position and superior observational skills. In contrast to the Proemio, within the text, the reader is positioned as part of the town, or what might be called the village chorus. This is done through the revolving nature of the narration. As opposed to a typical narrator who is omniscient and all knowing, Verga’s narrator takes on the persona and opinions of the characters which he/she speaks about, so it is as if another, complicit townsperson is speaking rather than an outside and detached voice. This voice changes gender, age, social status, and privilege as it turns from one point to another, never holding the same perspective for too long. Initially this might seem to contradict what Verga hopes to achieve in his Proemio, namely objectivity, but the changing nature of the narrator allows the reader to at once feel part of the village, as if he were there hearing all of this firsthand, and to formulate for himself the image of each individual character. In this way, the reader’s opinion is incorporated into the pool of all village opinions and thus is implicated with the positioning of the town’s perspective. There are times when public opinion sways together and holds a particular

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61 “Only the observer, himself borne along the current, as he looks around him, has the right to concern himself with the weak who fall by the wayside,” (Verga Proemio).
position, sometimes in favor of the Malavoglia and often times against them. However, it is here that contention has the possibility of bleeding through this positioning; if a reader feels differently than the pool of public opinion, then critique becomes possible. It is difficult to say how possible this is given Verga’s introduction to the text and pre-positioning of the reader with him as the observer and already “above” those who are observed; this again carries over into the opinion of those townspeople who are not necessarily friends of the Malavoglia.

It should be noted that, in the beginning the Malavoglia family functioned as a single unit; and this unity was the foundation of their values, and essentially all of society’s, in Aci Trezza. As Padron ’Ntoni often says, “Per menare il remo bisogna che le cinque dita s’aiutino l’un l’altro,” the five fingers of which are the members of his family (Verga Malavoglia 7). However, as unfortunate events continue to bat against this family, it begins to tear. It is specifically the grandson ’Ntoni who deviates from the family fold and attempts to “make it” outside of Aci Trezza in the modern world. It is the drive towards “betterment,” as Verga puts it, that distinguishes ’Ntoni from the rest of his family and society; he is seen as abnormal to want to leave this town in order to find riches (Verga Malavoglia 166-68). In this way, Padron ’Ntoni and ’Ntoni the grandson posit two different conceptions of reality: the traditional perspective of Padron ’Ntoni, who more often than not speaks in proverbs and relies on what has been passed down to him, “dagli antichi;” and the progressive-ambitious perspective of ’Ntoni, whose desire to escape the poverty and labor that crush his family is more closely linked to the negativity of progress and its effects on the family (Verga Malavoglia 8). The terms with which ’Ntoni’s position is cast are almost exclusively negative from both society as a

62 “The five fingers of a hand had to pull together to row a good oar,” (Verga “House” 1).
63 “from the elders” (translation mine).
whole and from within the Malavoglia family; however, Padron 'Ntoni Malavoglia also falls under critique from other village characters for attempting to "get ahead" or change his economic position. When Piedipapera and zio Crocifisso come to confiscate the house by the medlar tree, which had been in the Malavoglia family for countless generations, Crocifisso suggests that this is how families meet their ruin—through striving to change their circumstance (Verga Malavoglia 115).

Through the examination of zio Crocifisso's character, we are able to learn more about the implicit commentary in the text, the nature of narration, and characterization of the society. Firstly, it should be noted that the titles padron, maestro, compare (for males), and comare (for females) are used as quasi-epithets to denote community between members of society. Crocifisso is referred to as zio because he is the uncle of another character, la Vespa, but does not have any blood relation to the Malavoglia. In the section that describes Crocifisso towards the beginning of the text, before we know what he is truly capable of, the language sways from quite affable and accepting to critical and disparaging:

_Egli badava agli affari suoi, ed avrebbe prestato anche la camicia; ma poi voleva esser pagato, senza tanti cristì; ed era inutile stargli a contare ragioni, perché era sordo, e per di più era scarso di cervello, e non sapeva dir altro che 'Quel che è di patto non è d'inganno', oppure 'Al giorno che promise si conosce il buon pagatore'” (Verga Malavoglia 37)65

This passage is important for a few reasons; the first is that it demonstrates the conversational tone of description and narrative throughout the text. The second

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64 Padron signifies a self-employed man; maestro a craftsman; compare and comare are close neighbors; zio here means uncle.
65 "He minded his own affairs, and would have loaned out the shirt on his back; but then he wanted to be paid, and without and shilly-shallying; and it was pointless to quibble, because he was deaf and short of brain-power into the bargain, and all he could say was 'what's been agreed is fair' and 'you will know the good payer on the promised day,'” (Verga "House" 33).
reason returns to our question about the narrator and his/her relationship to Verga as the author. In this passage, the reader is led to believe that the narrator’s opinion of Crocifisso is that he is not clever and simply takes care of himself, something that is lauded in the society as a quality of a respectable person, particularly in men. However, as the novel continues, the reader comes to know through his affairs that he actually is quite clever, which troubles the stability of this perspective. This opinion must then be representative of a general opinion as opposed to the narrator’s singular opinion because an omniscient narrator would already know of Crocifisso’s cunning ways and trickery that are unknown to the majority of townspeople. However, as I indicated earlier, it is difficult to say there is one narrator ever, at any point in the text, because he/she often absorbs the opinions of those about whom he/she is speaking. It is the revolving perspective of the narrator that allows the reader to more truthfully make up his own mind about the other characters. The author will always be part of the reading process because it is necessarily by his hand that the story is written, regardless of his intentions of objectivity; even if a writer only writes down of a situation what is actually said, the way in which he writes it will impose some structure, some sieve through which a reader must then interpret. In Verga’s case, the function of the revolving narrator and the village chorus do aid in minimizing the effect of heavy authorial hand by allowing for multiple voices to carry the melody.

What comes to light in I Malavoglia is the everyday, unaltered, brutal realities of these characters due to their socio-economic conditions. They are not drowning under the circumstances they are in because they were morally wrong or of a sinful culture or nature; rather it is because of the cycle they are trapped in which is made worse by the unification of the state. McWilliam states that the tragedy of life becomes the center of Verga’s work, but I think that is an over simplification that does not recognize the extent
of work done by Verga’s project (McWilliam 13). Tragedy is underlined, highlighted
even, but it is not the centerpiece of I Malavoglia; rather the village Aci Trezza and the
family Malavoglia inhabit the focus of this text. The only reason tragedy appears to be
highlighted is because of its extreme presence in both of these subjects—Aci Trezza and
the Malavoglia—in relation to other class contexts where tragedy is significantly less
present. Furthermore, with I Malavoglia, Verga brings the peasantry, and thus tragedy,
closer to the center of intellectual and cultural discourse; so that is no longer teeters on
the periphery but inches closer to the heart.

Although the novel is “about” the Malavoglia family, Verga flushes out—granted
to differing degrees—all of the main characters of the town using the device of prosa
dialogata and observation of action. In other words, it is context and plot not pure
description that provoke an emotional response from the reader. For example, in I
Malavoglia, it is not what the family says about losing their house, or how the narrator
describes them, that makes us feel for them; it is rather the circumstances of the event
and what they do once it happens:

La roba la trasportarono di notte, nella casuccia del beccaio che avevano
presà in affitto, come se non si sapesse in paese che la casa del nespolo
oramai era di Piedipapera, e loro dovevano sgomberarla, ma almeno
nessuno li vedeva colla roba in collo (Verga Malavoglia 115)\footnote{“They took their things away at night, to the little house which they had rented from the butcher, as though the whole village didn’t know that the house by the medlar tree belonged to Piedipapera now, and that they had had to leave it; but at least no one saw them with their belongings in their arms,” (Verga “House,” 113).}

The characterization of Aci Trezza is equally important to the functioning of this
text. Aci Trezza occupies at once a specific and also indeterminate space. It is specific in
that it is a seaside village, where the main industry is fishing, which greatly influences
the economy and the availability of occupations; it is also situated on the periphery of
Catania, one of the largest cities in Sicily. Besides these facts, however, there is not much to distinguish Aci Trezza from other Sicilian villages; this is in part implied in the Proemio, where Verga states his choice to study this village as a representation of all “basse sfere.” I do not think it is necessary to remain on this point for too long, but it should not go unnoticed that Verga chose a southern, specifically Sicilian, village to represent this sphere, rather than a village in the North or even on the mainland. As I mentioned previously, Aci Trezza itself seems to share multiple similarities with an oral society and is thus additionally removed from modern, literate, society. These similarities come through in a number of ways: one, the prevalence of proverb and the use of it in everyday speech recalls the oral tradition of maintaining all of a family’s experience in the human memory, which, then as part of society, becomes collective. I think specifically about Padron ‘Ntoni’s use, but more than that, his reliance on such proverbial advice and tradition that has been passed down to him from his ancestors and which he intends, even obstinately, to pass down to his progeny.

Additionally, there are a few instances in which Padron ‘Ntoni and La Longa have texts or letters read to them by more educated members of the community, demonstrating their own either limited or non-existent literacy. Secondly, the way in which the village chorus gives the narrative many qualities of a conversation: for example, a new event only enters into the narrative when one member of society or the village chorus asks a question or interrupts the scene in a given moment. The pace also exhibits conversational momentum, with lulls and highs that seem to correspond to the society’s general feeling and enthusiasm. This is also felt in the way in which all community members appear to discuss and gossip with one another, without leaving

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67 Of course, this is not a true "study," this is fictional; the idea is that he did study a village like Aci Trezza and then based his text on those observations.
any stone unturned. Even when Padron ‘Ntoni is on his deathbed, the Malavoglia are not able to keep the rest of the village out of their small house:

*e tutte le vicine, come udirono il campanello per la stradicciuola del Nero,

accorrevano a vedere il viatico che andava dai Malavoglia, ed entravano tutte, perché dove va il Signore non si può chiudere l’uscio in faccia alla gente, tanto che quei poveretti al vedersi la casa piena non osavano nemmeno piangere e disperarsi *(Verga Malavoglia 135)*

Such is the proximity of the village. The lack of time markers and the spatial mapping of the village also give Aci Trezza the semblance of swimming in time and space. The layout of the village, or so it seems, is such that every window is visible from every other window and the village square is connected to everything, and hints at an uncomfortable intimacy within the community.

This text is important to my inquiry because it has the potential to challenge the Northern hegemony and give voice to the South. Despite having the theoretical tools we need to dig into this discussion, it is nevertheless a very difficult task to pinpoint the success or failure of a text in this way. It is difficult in the first instance because we cannot answer the questions we want to no matter how great our efforts. Questions like, does this text challenge Northern hegemony, does it bring the subaltern South to consciousness, does it allow for a positive assertion of the South in light of Northern cultural domination?

Questioning from the perspective of an outsider to this situation—of Northern intellectual-moral hegemony—we are already in a position of power in relation to the South on behalf of which we are inquiring. Because as outsiders we have the ability and

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*68 "...and when they heard the bell ringing down the strada del Nero, the neighborhood women came to see the viaticum being taken to the Malavoglia, and they all went in, because you cannot shut the door in people’s faces where the Lord is walking, so that those poor creatures, seeing the house so full, didn’t even dare to cry and despair" *(Verga “House,” 133).*
means to raise these questions, and furthermore, to hold and exercise opinions about the answers or non-answers we uncover, we are unable to see from a Southern perspective. Therefore, we are significantly disabled from truly answering these questions despite our efforts. In order to “truly” find the answers, we would have to be able to judge the accuracy and veracity of them from personal life experience: that is to say, without experiencing what it is like to be a Southerner—which one can never do unless he or she is born into that situation—we cannot verify any of the answers or approximations we find. Thus, the questions we so hope to answer can only truly be resolved by those in the subaltern position. It must be said that any attempt to answer on the behalf of Southerners is itself a part of the problem of hegemony because this attempt is necessarily a type of speaking for the subaltern rather than making room for or aiding a subaltern voice. In this way, all attempts from an outside position are contaminated and artificial. However, without trying, we allow for the discourse that creates these problems to continue uninterrupted and automatically fall into compliance.

The first thing to be decided is whether or not Verga did in fact objectively render this portrait of Aci Trezza, and if it bears as close a resemblance to reality as he suggests. In many ways this question has already been answered through our discussion of the Proemio, in which a number of Verga’s biases come through. However, in the text alone, the reader is not necessarily pushed one way or another, primarily due to the village chorus. Verga takes a rather Marxist approach to his study by specifically dividing it along class lines. According to Marx, and Gramsci, socio-economic classes—the peasantry, the bourgeois, the aristocracy—do not form around a particular mentality but rather come to hold that mentality, or those mentalities, because of the forces of production to which they are most closely linked. In I Malavoglia, Verga
demonstrates what he sees as the mentality of the fishing peasantry in 1860; one of the more overt examples of this occurs when some of the townspeople discuss the weather:

Padron Cipolla lo sapeva lui perché non piove più come prima. ‘Non piove più perché hanno messo quel maledetto filo del telegrafo, che si tira tutta la pioggia, e se la porta via.’ Compare Mangiacarrubbe allora, e Tino Piedipapera rimasero a bocca aperta, perché giusto sulla strada di Trezza c’erano i pali del telegrafo ma siccome don Silvestro cominciava a ridere, e a fare ah! ah! ah! come una gallina... ‘Che non lo sapevano che il telegrafo portava le notizie da un luogo all’altro!; questo succedeva perché dentro il filo ci era un certo succo come nel tralcio della vite, e allo stesso modo si tirava la pioggia dalle nuvole, e se la portava lontano’

(Verga Malavoglia 41-42)

If this is a sincere representation, and does capture the generally held beliefs of this social class—in this particular village—then we are to believe that many peasants either thought the telegraph wires worked similarly to trees or did not know how they worked at all. If this text is to help the lower classes attain consciousness, they would have to realize that the reason why don Silvestro is laughing so heartily is because the reason Padron Cipolla gives for the lack of rain is preposterous to him; and it is because he, as the town clerk and one of the more educated members of society, does know how they function. Similarly, throughout the text, it is rather nuance and implicit opinion that

69 "Padron Cipolla personally knew why it never rained now as it used to do. ‘It never rains nowadays because they’ve put up that dratted telegraph wire, which attracts all the rain and draws it away.’ Then compare Mangiacarrubbe and Tino Piedipapera stood open-mouthed, because indeed there were telegraph posts right there on Trezza road; but don Silvestro began his farmyard cackling... ‘Didn’t they know that the telegraph carried news from one place to the next; it did this because there was a sort of juice inside the wire like the sap in the vine tendril, and in the same way it drew water from the clouds and carried it away,’” (Verga “House,” 38).

70 It should be noted that Cipolla cites the chemist, one of the “city bigwigs,” as the source for this knowledge, thus indicating that either very few or none of the residents of Aci Trezza are certain of how the telegraphs function.
expose the workings of Northern hegemony. For example, how zio Crocifisso relies on Padron 'Ntoni's blind trust in neighbors to make the lupine deal in the first place and then relies on the Malavoglia pride after the deal has gone bad in order to get his money; or the dismissal of female judgment and suggestion, which in many instances would have been highly beneficial had the men taken notice.

While there are many characters who blame the new government for their present condition, there is not a single one who openly criticizes don Silvestro, zio Crocifisso, or any other individual who benefits substantially from the present hegemony. Nor is there any criticism of the system at large, with defined social classes and social identities born out of those classes. 'Ntoni's objection to the life he and his family have fallen into due to a continuous cycle of debt comes very close to pinpointing what Gramsci thinks of as the culprit of class division—capitalism—but the text confines 'Ntoni's critique to a simple appetite, a slothful desire to be rich and untroubled. It is as if the culture of the society compresses his objections to nothing more than a rejection of traditional and familial norms, without allowing him, or pushing him, to find the source of these problems. He is seen as merely envying the rich and wishing he didn’t have to work so hard.

In this way, the text does not challenge the Northern hegemony—it plays right into it. It does not allow for social critique and then it configures the very culture as the cause for its suppression.\textsuperscript{71} This fits quite nicely into the prescribed notion of the South that the North has constructed. Leaving the Proemio aside, the text alone does position the Malavoglia family in a positive light; they're only fault in that they trusted where they should have shown caution. However, if we do consider the Proemio, we have no

\textsuperscript{71} In the Proemio, Verga deems the lower classes as uncultivated and not as articulate as the other classes. There is also the idea that the society never thought to consider 'Ntoni's thoughts on society's condition compared to the bigger cities'. The same community that they thought he was shirking did in a way fail him as well.
choice but to view a large part of the text as a critique of the Malavoglia for striving—and not even wholeheartedly—for an easier life.

For similar reasons, it cannot be said that Verga gives voice to the South or even to Aci Trezza, but rather speaks for them. I think at one point when Verga had just begun the *I Vinti* project, it may have given voice to the subaltern by drawing attention to it and opening its reality to the eyes of the powerful; at this time, however, *I Malavoglia* was very much disliked by the powerful bourgeoisie (Lane “Introduction”). I think it is precisely because the text was not held in high regard that it was in a position to give voice to rather than speak for the South. As it stood, following the success of *Cavalleria Rusticana* in 1884, the blunt reality of the Southern peasant was once again romanticized, and it was made acceptable and consumable to the upper classes. Despite Verga’s attempt at objectivity and dedication to picturing the lower world in its own terms and language, his work ultimately became validated by the hegemonic powers, which effectively extended those powers to him. Because the nature of being subaltern is being abject from the hegemonic, that which can make room for subaltern resistance must necessarily be outside of the hegemony. In other words, whatever comes out of hegemonic discourse must necessarily pass through its own conception of reality, the structure that it places on the world. Just as it is with a piece of writing in which the author cannot help but impose some filter, and through which a reader must then interpret: the discourse that comes out of the hegemony is inaccessible, unusable to the subaltern because it does not have access to that filter or any means by which to translate what has been transposed through it. Furthermore, the subaltern does not have a medium through which to put those ideas to work because those ideas only exist in the hegemonic perspective. Like two different languages, the subaltern perspective and the hegemonic are not mutually understandable. The ideas administered by the
hegemonic culture will not combine with anything in the subaltern body in order to make it resistant to its own thoughts. The only way, it seems, for there to be a resistance to cultural hegemony is to create an anti-culture, modeled off the North in the same way the North had modeled itself off the South.

It must be said that, given all the good intentions that may be ascribed to an author implicated in the hegemonic conception, as Verga is, the good accomplished will always be less than what could be accomplished by the subaltern class alone. Any movement from within the hegemonic structure will just continue to grow the hegemony, continuously incorporating groups, ideas, and beliefs; true resistance is not found in assumption into, but rather further removal from the center. The subaltern, being on the periphery of the hegemonic, in order to mount a full resistance, must create a counter center so as not to be subsumed by the metropole. Therefore, it may be said that, although Verga does posit a few positive assertions about the South, they are not as powerful as he or others may have hoped because of his position in writing the text. We must also remember that, despite any good intentions to aid the Southern cause, a large part of the problem is that all of the south tends to be spoken for as if it were a single entity, which, as we know, it is clearly not.

Given Verga's literary career, we can see how Gramsci’s idea of prestige works in real time—by beginning in one central area and then spreading to the outskirts. Likewise, the popularity of his new subject, the Sicilian peasant, initially began in relative distaste but as it, in conjunction with other stories of a similar kind, accumulated attention his career soon took off. We can see how hegemony can make a center out of anything, or rather subsume anything into its center: the subject of the text.

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72 This refers primarily to the ultimate success of this text’s as well as *Cavalleria Rusticana*’s, which, having been created in Milan, eventually spread throughout the country.
Sicilian peasant was initially discarded as unappealing and erroneous, but as Verga's other works generated attention and eventual acclaim, this subject became very much part of northern mainstream literary and operatic culture—a two forms extremely situated in the higher classes.

Since the positioning of *I Malavoglia* in relation to Gramsci’s theory has been largely directed by the biography and ideology of the author, it would useful to see if a different author with a different background offers similar or diverse results. Granted, it is not only the author’s perspective but also the text itself apart from authorial intent and background that must be considered. As was said, I privileged *I Malavoglia* because of its position in the Italian canon, its historical significance, and above all its subject matter; likewise, a text should be chosen that fits similar criteria but offers a different perspective. In relation to Verga, Carlo Levi cannot be described as a “proper” Italian author: he is equally if not better known for his painting, and cannot be squarely placed in a given genre as an artist. Rather his works, particularly *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (1945), fall partly under several categories but are never truly explained entirely by any.

Levi was born in Turin in 1902 to an upper middle class family, his father being a doctor and his mother being a well-known socialist leader (Troiano). He studied medicine at the University of Turin however, decided later on after practicing for a few years that he would rather devote his time to painting and politics. During the mid-1920’s-early 1930’s, he was an outspoken anti-fascist activist as part of the movement, *Giustizia e Libertà*, which ultimately led to his arrest and banishment in 1935. He was found in contempt of the Mussolini government and sentenced to house arrest in an

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73 *Cavalleria Rusticana* was turned into a play by Verga and eventually into an opera libretto by Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci, an art form in which it thrived. The composer was Pietro Mascagni.

74 That is not to say that lower classes did not consume or enjoy opera or literature, rather that the upper classes were the targeted audience for the composers and authors of the time.
obscure southern town in the southern region of Lucania—now known as Basilicata (Rotella vii). Levi was first deposited in Grassano; after one year, he was then transported to the even smaller village of Aliano, which in the memoir is called Gagliano (Rotella vii). It is in this remote skeleton of a town that his story takes place.

Before we even get to the text itself, the reader, confronted with this knowledge, knows immediately how the Italian South is regarded by the Fascist regime and possibly the majority of Italians, as well as what the people in the South must realize about their position in Italian society. The act of banishment by the Fascist regime to a “lesser” part of its own country is extremely offensive and speaks volumes about the way power is structured and maintained in the state itself. This not only indicates that public opinion was such that being exiled to this part of the country was worse than imprisonment, but also that the government knew this and exploited the socio-economic divide between the wealthy North and the poor South; through this process, the government also reinforced these divides and even encouraged them.

On the first page of the text, we are presented with an example of how the Southerners—at this point unidentified—have internalized this negative identity as other, outside of normative culture, and worthless, that was held by the government and the North in general. Levi explains the title of the book as a saying he would hear the peasants tell, indicating their abjection from even Christ:

\[ e \text{ la frase proverbiale che ho sentito tante volte ripetere, nelle loro bocche non è forse nulla più che l'espressione di uno sconsolato complesso di inferiorità. Noi non siamo cristiani, non siamo uomini, non siamo considerati come uomini, ma bestie, bestie da soma, e ancora meno le bestie, } \]
As we will see, the extent to which this identity has been felt and in many ways accepted by the people of Gagliano is significantly engrained and necessarily informs their perception of reality.

Before we move on to the text, we must first reconcile Levi as both a character and an author. Considering this text is most closely classified and marketed as a memoir, it might be assumed—and might more easily be assumed—that it is an honest rendering of what Levi had experienced while under house arrest in Aliano. However, the time lapse between his stay there and his writing of the text, as well as the text’s literary flair troubles the assumed objectivity. I am not saying that we should consider all of what Levi describes as false, but we must keep in mind the possibility of flux and distortion that are possible and probable given the circumstances under which the text was written; not to mention Levi’s position of authority to manipulate the information within the text. There does not appear to be a significant gap between Levi the character and Levi the author; it reads as if he wrote the text while in Aliano, which helps to alleviate the temporal distance but also undermines the reality of it as true-to-life narrative.

What Levi has been so lauded for in this text is the vivid imagery of the people he met, the landscape, and the conditions he witnessed. Unlike Verga, Levi uses much more description as opposed to dialogue. This is most likely due to the nature of the text since *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* is not as plot driven as *I Malavoglia* is but rather unfolds like a diary in a very linear narrative and at a constant pace. This might also be due to the fact

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75 “This almost proverbial phrase that I have so often heard them repeat may be no more than the expression of a hopeless feeling of inferiority. We’re not Christians, we’re not human beings; we’re not thought of as men but simply as beasts, beasts of burden, or even less than beasts, mere creatures of the wild” (Levi “Christ” 3).
that Verga’s reliance on dialogue was a strategy to retain as much reality as possible and not rely on authorial manipulation; whereas Levi’s work as a memoir already has the stamp of realism so to speak and does not need to strive for this recognition.

When Levi first meets some of the townspeople, he notices how they react to him being a Northern doctor and gentleman. The first people he encounters is “Professor” Luigi Magalone, the schoolteacher and mayor of Gagliano, and the elder Dr. Milillo, the official doctor in town and Magalone’s uncle. In this first meeting Levi tell us how Milillo tries to relate to Levi as another man of culture, and how he digs through his memory to find bits of information that would prove his education:

> come il nipote, si sente obbligato a mostrarmi la sua cultura, cercando negli angoli bui della memoria qualche antiquato termine medico rimasto là dagli anni dell’Università, come un trofeo d’armi dimenticato in soffitta (Levi Cristo 13)

As the conversation goes on, the majority of which we do not hear but are told about by Levi, Milillo seems to speak in a way that he imagines a Northerner would speak; he says of the peasants of the village, “Good people, but primitive. Above all look out for the women,” and goes on to describe the potions and philters that they would try to give Levi unknowingly in a coffee or food (Levi Cristo 13). In this passage, Levi recounts what has been said and tells us how he intends to use this information—he completely ignores it—but in the process tells us implicitly what he thinks about the people he has just met. By choosing to ignore the advice, Levi obviously does not believe in the same world as these two men, yet he does not judge them; where it would be the norm for someone who has a Northern or “hegemonic” opinion to place a value on this

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76 “Like his nephew, he felt obliged to make a show of his culture, searching the corners of his mind for outdated medical terms left over from his years at the university. They were like war trophies forgotten in the attic” (Levi “Christ” 13).
conception of the world—as even Milillo does—Levi rather agrees to disagree and moves on.

Levi does in many ways actively combat stereotypes of the South and rather tries to shed light on the way the people of Gagliano actually behave, think, and interact. He says explicitly:

Quello che si racconta, e che io stesso credevo vero, della severità feroce dei costumi, della gelosia turchesca, del selvaggio senso dell’onore familiare che porta ai delitti e alle vendette, non è che leggenda quaggiù

(Levi Cristo 89)\(^77\)

In this passage also, he describes the matriarchal turn that Southern society in Basilicata has taken since emigration; he tells us that Gagliano has 1,200 inhabitants and around 2,000 men already emigrated to America. Grassano is said to have 5,000 inhabitants and as many emigrated (Levi Cristo 89-90). In this way, Levi tries to speak about the realities as they surface through the filter and language of Gagliano society and not as a Northerner might be expected to through his own opinions and perspective. Following an account of a little white church that housed the horns of a dragon that had infested the region in ancient times, Levi tells us, “che ci fossero, da queste parti, dei draghi, nei secoli medioevali...non fa meraviglia” (Levi Cristo 98).\(^78\) Nor is there any conflict to be found in the woman who was born of a cow but also had a human mother (Levi Cristo 98). The distance between what we might call myth and reality is much shorter than in a world dominated by science, as is the North. This myth, what Gramsci describes as

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\(^77\) “All that people say about the people of the South, things I once believed myself; the savage rigidity of their morals, their Oriental jealousy, the fierce sense of honor leading to crimes of passion and revenge, all these are but myths” (Levi “Christ” 102).

\(^78\) “there is nothing strange in the fact that there were dragons in these parts in the Middle Ages” (Levi “Christ” 112).
folklore, informs the conception of reality that the peasants of Gagliano have; so in their perspective, it is not classified as myth but rather history.

What seems to fascinate Levi are the customs that govern Gagliano, especially those that regulate interactions between the sexes. He gives a short but detailed account of helping an elderly woman with a heart condition, Maria Rosano, who believed herself to be dying; he had told her that she would indeed be quite better soon and would be able to make the trip to his house across the village all by herself. However, when she did get better and visited his house, she was incredibly hesitant to enter and visibly uncomfortable. Levi tells us this was due to the custom of always being accompanied in the presence of the opposite sex; a custom that Maria had now broken (Levi *Cristo* 100-01). Levi often points out these customs and what he would call myths, seeped in ancient veracity, that continue to shape society. In the same way, Levi pictures Gagliano as specific to itself but very much unchanging, a sort of eternal south.

We can see this in the way the peasants speak about their world, as Levi describes: “*i contadini e la Giulia, che me ne parlavano, dicevano: ‘In tempi lontani, più di cent’anni fa, molto prima del tempo dei briganti’*” as if all historical events were much closer to the present (Levi *Cristo* 98).79 The use of the brigands as a temporal marker suggests the importance that the peasants place on this historical period and the influence it still has over society. At this time in 1935, the brigands had existed over seventy years ago. Levi pays great attention to the way the peasants especially perceive and view the State. As he says, “*non erano fascisti, come non sarebbero stati liberali o*

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79 “the peasants and Giulia used to say: “A long time ago, more than a hundred years, long before the brigands” (Levi *“Christ”* 112).
They were not Fascists, just as they would never have been Conservatives or Socialists...the belonged to another world and they saw no sense in them,” (Levi “Christ” 76).

Everyone knows...that the fellows in Rome don’t want us to live like human beings. There are hailstorms, landslides, droughts, malaria, and...the State...they make us kill off our goats, they carry away our furniture, and now they’re going to send us to the wars. Such is life! (Levi “Christ” 76).

See chapter two, page 38-39.
"cattivo a mostrare due file di denti bianchissimi, potenti come quelli di un lupo" and her body which "spirante una forza animalesca" (Levi Cristo 91-92). Later on in trying to persuade Giulia to pose for a portrait, Levi struggles to find a way to garner the desired results:

Io capii anche che, per vincere questo suo timore magico, avrei dovuto adoperare una magia più forte della paura; e questa non poteva essere che una potenza diretta e superiore, la violenza...Come prevedevo, nulla era più desiderabile per lei che di essere dominata da una forza assoluta. Divenuta a un tratto docile come un agnello (Levi Cristo 137)

His tone in this passage holds itself above Giulia just as he in the moment exercised his power as the gentleman for whom she works. Levi’s participation in this “magic,” in the realm of non-science, is at once capitalizing on the perspective Giulia appears to hold and his position of power above her.

There are not many other instances similar to this one for a number of reasons; the first being that Levi is in fact a prisoner of the village. His being free to roam about the designated area and paint at will must not fool us into thinking he is above the law. Secondly, he is an outcast from hegemonic society at the time—he is not a fascist supporter. Again, despite his apparent Northern cultural power, Levi is in fact abjected from that hegemony which has been assumed by the Fascist government.

It may very well be this position of abjection from the current but relation to the former hegemony that enables Levi to give voice to the situation and characters he meets in Gagliano. What is more is, Levi makes the effort to distinguish between

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83 “when she opens her mouth in wicked laughter she shows two lines of the whitest teeth, as powerful as those of a wolf” (translation mine).
84 “breathed an animal vigor” (Levi “Christ” 105)
85 I further realized that in order to overcome her scruples I should have to make use of a magic even stronger than fear, an irresistible power, namely violence...Just as I had imagined, she knew no greater happiness than that of being dominated by an absolute power (Levi “Christ” 154-55).
Gagliano and Grassano in spite of them being so close to one another, located within the same region, and sharing a number of similarities. In Grassano, a latifondi\textsuperscript{86} arrangement ruled the peasants, whereas in Gagliano they usually owned a piece of land:

\begin{quote}
I contadini di Grassano vivano di anticipi sul raccolto, e quando è il tempo delle messi, di rado arrivano a pagare il debito...legandoli sempre di più nella rete della squallida povertà. Quelli di Gagliano lavorono il loro campo, e non raccolgono mai quello che basti a nutrirli e a pagare l’Ufficiale Esattoriale...perciò anch’essi sono costretti alla denutrizione, a non possono pensare a muoversi e a cambiare stato. Non vi è nessuna reale differenza nella vita di questi e di quelli. (Levi Cristo 145-46)\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

This separation between two parts of the South is not something that we find in many other Northern accounts of the South; in fact, one of the translators of this text falls into that very trap in the introduction (Rotella ix). In this way, Levi does give voice to the Southern perspective(s) and also does much work to challenge the hegemonic conception of the South. As we have said earlier, his attention to the system of beliefs held by the peasants in Gagliano and detailed descriptions of the habits, interactions, and customs allows for a fuller picture of this particular society to come through.

I think it may be said with this evidence that Levi also troubles Gramsci’s idea of the traditional intellectual. While Verga would fall almost squarely into the description of the traditional intellectual, in this text, Levi, who is more closely associated with the traditional intellectual as well, does something more along the line of an organic

\textsuperscript{86} Large estates that employed landless laborers in conditions that were strikingly similar to feudal times.

\textsuperscript{87} “The peasants of Grassano lived off of advanced payments for the crops, but when the harvest came around they were rarely able to pay back what they had borrowed. At Gagliano...they never produced enough to feed their families and pay their taxes, and whatever money they laid aside after a fat year went for doctors’ bills” (Levi “Christ” 165).
intellectual—he articulates the mentality and conception of reality that the peasants have in such a way that others may come to understand them.

An aspect of Levi’s character that we have not yet considered in great detail is his political position as a Communist. Given the tenets of Communism, its goals and aspirations, it may be that Levi is inclined through this mindset to more readily see the peasant culture as having equal value to that of the bourgeois. That is to say, that just as all people are equal, all culture and thought is as well. This position comes through in his writing specifically when he calls attention to the beliefs of the peasants, or what might be called superstitions in other contexts. Additionally, Levi’s political background could place him more justly in the position of a party intellectual as Gramsci conceived it; because Levi is trained as a traditional intellectual but has a tendency, even fondness, towards the lower classes, he could very easily be thought of as a party intellectual—one who helps to raise the consciousness of the lower classes. Whether this was the purpose of his work is, however, uncertain; I would have to say that Levi’s purpose in the text is more geared to the Northern and even international world rather than toward the peasantry. However, overall, I believe Levi’s text to be significantly more helpful to destabilizing the hegemonic discourse on the South and troubling *la questione meridionale* in general.
Concluding Thoughts

The question of representation that was raised briefly in chapter one\(^{88}\) must now be brought to full fruition. It is not a simple matter of how the South has been represented by the North, though that is very much at the heart of the problem; but rather it is a question of representability lost, or taken, that functions alongside the act of representation. In other words, the South resists being represented. The South as a concept encompasses not only that which informs it but is necessarily external to it, i.e. what the naming subject\(^{89}\) constructs as the South, but also involves the experiences of being Southern—something which cannot be accessed by an outsider. As such, what it means to be Southern is un-representable. At the same time, a condition of being Southern is the inability to voice your thoughts in your own language, essentially eliminating the possibility to speak truthfully at all. Since the South remains within the power of the North, the only means of resistance available are through the terms and language of the dominant culture; in order to be heard at all, the South must adopt hegemonic language. This happens literally in Italy if a Southern society predominantly speaks a dialect and must then convert to using the Italian standard in order to reach a broader audience, including the government. Additionally, the South must resist in terms of the hegemonic culture, using a method that is made possible within that sphere. Therefore, it is possible that the only true\(^{90}\) form of resistance within language is through creation of a counter-culture organic to the subaltern society.

Recently in 2010, the Neapolitan rap group, Fuossera, put out a music video for their song *Voglia e Vulà* which is sung completely in dialect and is played alongside mainstream Italian rap (Fuossera). It is in blatant opposition to the hegemonic norm

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\(^{88}\) See page 26.
\(^{89}\) See page 26.
\(^{90}\) True in that every aspect of the resistance is in itself original and outside of the hegemonic culture.
and was initially unpopular as such; however, it eventually caught on, people began to learn the Neapolitan and started incorporating some terms and phrases into everyday mainstream use. What started out as a rebellion against hegemonic culture succeeded in one way by becoming popular, infiltrating the dominant consciousness; but how successful was it truly? It did generate interest in Neapolitan culture and in a way acquired recognition, validation even, by hegemonic Italian society. Yet, this success was entirely under hegemonic terms, on its own time, in its own way, and was in no way directed by a Neapolitan initiative or leader. There arises the question, what kind of resistance is possible, but also, what is most helpful. This song essentially failed as a proponent of an alternative culture because it was assumed by the norm. In a very similar way, Verga’s *verismo* texts had the potential to give voice to the South but were ultimately subsumed by the dominant culture. But can this be positive for the subaltern? Is this not a way to overcome objection, abjection, and otherness, by joining the hegemony?

The question again comes down to the reality of the subaltern: that “it” is in fact a “they” in that there are many different cultures that are included under the umbrella of the subaltern but are not necessarily related in origin or even experience. Just as dialects vary in difference from standard Italian, the experiences of each subaltern group may differ, and with varying degrees, from other subaltern groups; yet, they are still considered all the same in relation to the hegemonic. This then becomes a problem not only of representation but of recognition as well, especially in Italy: on December 15, 1999, the Italian government passed a law entitled "Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche" which sought to give lingual rights to certain large

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91 Act on the Protection of Historic Linguistic Minorities (translation mine).
communities of foreign language speakers within Italy ("Lingua"). Some of these rights included allowing the elementary schools within certain districts to teach in both the minority language and Italian, but the real significance of this law was the fact of being recognized by the Italian government as a protected culture. The six "linguistic minorities" listed under this law are Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovenian and Croatian; the law also extends to the citizens who speak French, Franco-Provençal, Friuli, Romansh, Old Provençal and Sardinian. While the law does seek to expand lingual rights to previously unrecognized cultural groups, it leaves out and, by way of, excludes a good number of other minority populations that are in fact quite large in Italy.

The reason I raise this point is to highlight the pertinence of this conversation: language has the power to enable but also disable in very palpable ways. As we can see with this law, the Italian government made explicit who they would protect and give rights to and who they would not. Furthermore, the terms with which we choose to have this discussion are not helping the situation but rather continue to fuel it, no matter where the discussion is being held—in academia, an international summit, or the United Nations itself (Dirlik 13). I am referring to the emergent critical category of the "Global South". According to Arif Dirlik, a former professor of History at Duke University, the Global South was born out of the discourse surrounding post-World War II modernization in the 1970's and was used to describe societies that "seemed to face difficulties in achieving the economic and political goals of either capitalist or socialist modernity" (Dirlik 12-13). It is a concept that is now used to describe societies that seem to share a similar experience of subalternity in their respective contexts. As was

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92 For an English translation of the law, please see "Act on Protection of Historic Linguistic Minorities".
93 One example of an excluded minority population is the Romanian communities that are dispersed throughout Italy.
stated in the first issue of the relatively new academic journal entitled *The Global South*, Alfred J. Lopez writes:

> The global South also marks the mutual recognition among the world’s subalterns of their shared condition at the margins of the brave new neoliberal world of globalization. The global South diverges from the postcolonial, and emerges as a postglobal discourse (Lopez 1).

In other words, the societies that make up what we consider to be the South now recognize each other as sharing in the same experience and that the conversation about these societies has changed given the extent and effect of globalization. The statement also seems to suggest that there exists a unified hegemony; that the Norths and the Wests\(^{94}\) have now combined their powers to form a new kind of hegemony that dictates the creation of a new discourse. It follows that, with the creation of a new hegemony—a new North—there must be a new South, which is exactly what the Global South seems to be. If this is the case, the conversation now surrounding the Global South is not a new one at all but rather a continuation of the same North-South dialectic. And as such, carries with it the same problems that were not dealt with previously. By grouping all societies that do not have a strong voice in society, suggesting they all share the same experience and occupy the same position, necessarily disables the discourse of the Global South from changing the dynamics of previous binary models. As we can see, it shares a great resemblance to the discussion within Italy regarding its own South.

If we are to create the conditions which would allow for the subaltern to escape its current position or to create positive identities and experiences from within it, then we must change the terms of the conversation. It can no longer be an imbalanced dialectic, with all the power on one side, but must be instead something more inclusive,

\(^{94}\) For example, as is North America or Western Europe.
a sphere if you will. If this were the case, there would not be a single way for power to flow but would necessarily come from multiple places on the globe and meet at random points of convergence. As it stands now, there are many positions on this sphere but power nevertheless flows from one kind of point to another that is South, without room for change so long as we continue to have the same conversation about it. Instead of positioning the subaltern in direct opposition to the hegemonic through questions of creation, development, and resistance, perhaps we could change the way we interrogate the problem. If we begin to ask of the North similar questions as those we asked of the South—how was it constructed, who is considered part of it, who created it—we may begin to deconstruct the North. Instead of concentrating the conversation on the South, as it is in Italy with la questione meridionale, setting up a one way street of discourse that travels from the North southward, we should seek to speak outwards from multiple points. This requires self-reflection on the North's part but more importantly a conversion of the discussion so that the focus is on the North rather than the South. I am not suggesting that this is the only way to alter the dynamics of the discourse on Othering, but it may be a start. In any case, the work that is being done in Global South studies remains promising so long as it keeps in mind the problems of its predecessors and seeks potential in its subjects.
Appendix A

Hoe's One Cylinder Printing Press (Jocelyn)
Appendix B

The Unification of Italy, 1815-1870 (Shepherd)
Works cited


