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The Corsican Quest for the Real: The Struggle for Self Identification among Cultural Militants in Corsica's Movement for Cultural Reacquisition

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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By Sarah H. Davis

Over the past 35 years on the French island of Corsica, self-described cultural militants have led a movement for cultural reacquisition called the *riacquistu.* Militants have fought to re-appropriate and valorize the *vrai* (true) Corsican tradition, identity and language. The riacquistu overlaps with Corsica's violent nationalist movement, which seeks political autonomy from the French State. This dissertation focuses on the riacquistu, in particular the population of cultural militants in Northern Corsica, in the area roughly corresponding to the arrondissement of Corte, which has been a center of cultural and political activism on the island since the late 1960s. During 14 months of fieldwork, I found that these militants are, in fact, highly critical of the deluge of riacquistu discourse and cultural production that they themselves have helped create and successfully perpetuate over the past few decades. Now many feel that the riacquistu has done more harm than good, and they argue that it has further buried the *true* Corsican tradition and identity rather than vindicate it, as the movement was meant to do. This anti-riacquistu sentiment has led to a fascinating new genres of identity discourse and methods of cultural reacquisition, which attempt to bring to the surface what these militants feel has been lost as a result of their riacquistu efforts. The discourse, activities, and cultural production of militants in, what I call, this "second wave" of activism is the focus of the dissertation. Ultimately, what I found is that these militants are expressing an understanding of cultural essence and authenticity that they argue is corrupted when standardized, extracted from life through research, and put into books, museums, or even political platforms (which is largely what the riacquistu has done). This is particularly interesting because the vision of cultural essence they are now invoking does not align with what anthropologists have come to expect from movements waged in the name of essential or true identity (whether ethnic, national, or cultural). Rather than problematic Enlightenment ideals of homogeneity, ethnic or linguistic purity, a bounded homeland, or an immemorial past, these Corsicans are expressing something remarkably different.

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Arrival

It was late afternoon in early December 2007. We drove off the ferry onto the French island of Corsica in the tiny Renault Twingo my husband David and I had just bought from a rather suspect used-car salesman on the outskirts of Nice. Jackson, our 15-month-old son, peeked out from between the suitcases to see what was coming, to see the new home we'd been preparing him for over the past months. Our drive inward and upward from the Mediterranean coast was sunny and cold. We had vast views of steely mountains speckled with bright green patches and the occasional stray cow or herd of goats. Ancient walls came in and out of view marking defunct terrace farms, old estate boundaries, shepherds' paths, and on occasion, the remnants of a Roman road. This was Corsica, finally.

We saw the ruins of old houses, often collapsing into themselves, their windows boarded up. Their decrepitude did not take away from the landscape, but seemed an extension of it. We would learn that these houses remained, crumbling, un-renovated but not torn down, because Corsican families still owned them. In century-old wills, Corsican land and estates were frequently designated as "property of heirs of X." To this day, to renovate, to sell, to tear down one of these houses, one must identify and locate *all* the heirs of X and arrange a mutually agreed upon settlement (Cool 2001). And, even if one manages to find all heirs, they often don't want to sell. Many Corsicans would rather have the house go into disrepair than give up the concrete mark of their Corsican heritage--even if that means rendering the home and the land uninhabitable. So these old

structures, these frames of lives past, are preserved, almost symbolically now, and the vines and sweet smelling island shrubbery creep into the windows, entangling the frames, coaxing them back into their natural surroundings and into obscurity.

In our first weeks on Corsica, getting us settled, making sure Jackson was okay, and navigating our new and very different world left me almost too tired to write. That scared me because writing is, in large part what fieldwork is all about. It is after all, as Clifford Geertz puts it, "what ethnographers do"(1977:10). I felt so concerned for my little family that it was hard to see beyond them. Sometimes instead of relishing the cultural barriers we confronted, those I was there to study—the desperate inefficiency of everything, the stone cold glances that met us in village life, the daily news of nationalist bombings throughout the island, the sounds of the militant and often deeply sorrowful Corsican music wafting from bars or homes, the wonderful lilt of heavily Corsican French—sometimes despite myself, instead of relishing these differences, I would see the displaced look in my son's eyes, and wish they would disappear.

As an anthropologist, I am fascinated by the epistemological and existential transformation that living in a foreign culture can provoke, but as a mother and a wife, I had a hard time accepting the fact that I was knowingly dragging my son and innocent husband into the trials of culture shock where everything you do is somehow off. Worlds that were meaningful and accessible can suddenly become inaccessible and hollow. In those early days, I witnessed this mostly through Jackson's eyes. When he pointed determinedly at a dog and announced "dog," his eyes were not met (as they had been only weeks before) by nodding heads and smiles of approval. This was not a dog, but *un chien* or *u cane*. At 15 months he was not exactly aware of his disappointment, but there

was a level of confusion and unease. This confusion also exists for adults, except we know that there are two languages at work and so aren't as baffled. But, unlike children, we are expected by others (and ourselves) to be competent**.** David and I frequently displayed our incompetence either in language or in custom. David told the crèche where Jackson eventually started going for daily child care that he'd "*revendre*" rather than "*revenir*" for Jackson (resell rather than return to pick up). We declined a neighbor's offer to help us move apartments so as not to put him out and instead we insulted him, compromising the relationship we'd worked so hard to establish. We left our shutters open at night and didn't do our laundry often enough. I risked insult if I gave someone the customary "*bisous*" (kisses on both cheeks) without knowing them sufficiently and equally risked insult if I extended a hand when it should have been a kiss. Social errors small and large filled our days. For all these blunders, we were at best laughed at, at worst rebuked. For Jackson these rebukes may have been disorienting, but for us they could feel devastating. We'd been stung or repelled by a world that we thought we knew, thought we belonged in, thought we were inseparable from. Suddenly there was distance, a space between our meanings and the world in which those meanings traveled. We sought desperately to reconnect. This kind of struggle *is* anthropology.

It was dark that December evening when we eventually arrived in our small mountain village where we had arranged to rent an apartment. Our landlady lived in a city on the other side of the island, so her cousin, Ceccé, had given me rough directions the night before on the phone, telling me that if we couldn't find the small road to the apartment when we arrived, we should ask at the village bar for Ceccé Santoni's house. I had not been given a street name or number, which meant soon after we got to the village

I found myself approaching the dimly lit, somewhat intimidating bar in the village square. In still tentative French, I asked the group of gruff Corsican men, drinking at the bar, where I could find Ceccé 's house. Given Ceccé 's instructions, I was taken off guard when they looked at me with blank, cold stares. Maybe I had gone to the wrong bar, I thought. Maybe we were in the wrong village. I persisted, with a bit of desperation in my voice and worry on my face. Most of the men turned away from me and back to their conversation. Finally a man on the edge of the group turned to me and pointed up a steep hill in the distance. He insisted he didn't know but maybe that was the right way. Then he abruptly turned back to the conversation at the bar.

I would discover in the weeks that followed that all these men were regulars at the bar. They all knew Ceccé , and the one who actually came to my aid lived literally next door to him. Several weeks on Corsica, and the sensitive observer cannot help remarking upon the weighty presence of, what is locally referred to as, the *non dit*—what is not said, what is knowable but simply not sayable—and how this principled silence manages relationships, determines social and personal action and reputation. But more than that, the *non dit* determines what things mean and the realities that people live in.

Equally striking, though, is the presence of what one might call the *dit*, the hyperbolic articulations of what being Corsican is all about. These articulations are a constant feature of daily life on the island, in every form of media production and also in ordinary discourse. They are a product of the *riacquistu*, the social movement on Corsica waged by self-described "cultural militants" who have worked tirelessly over the past 35 years to "reacquire" and valorize the Corsican language, tradition, identity and way of life. The movement is described today by cultural activists using the terms cultural

"revindication," "reappropriation," "revitalization," and "reacquisition," relatively interchangeably. But, the movement is not described as a renaissance. It did not arise as the "rebirth" of the Corsican cultural tradition, giving *new* life to the ways of yore. Rather, it has been, what activists describe as, a "*prise de conscience*" (a realization) of that tradition, literally a taking consciousness of it.

Influenced by the wave of anti-authoritarian, postcolonial resistance that swept through universities in Western Europe and the United States in the latter half of the 20th century, Corsican university students experienced an awakening to the fact that they possessed a unique *patrimoine* (heritage), one that had never been studied or recorded or valorized, one that survived in the inner villages of the island but was on the verge of disappearing. The Corsican language, until that time, had basically remained unwritten, recordings of the traditional songs were scarce, and the traditional crafts and modes of production were on track to die out with the last generation of practitioners. French cultural-centrist policies between the 18th and 20th centuries had all but buried the unique cultural trajectory that this island had taken through time, and had almost succeeded in silencing it--almost.

Moved by a sense of duty and excitement, these young cultural militants came flooding back to the island, to the villages, to the oldest generations, and they did all they could to wrench this heritage back from the brink of extinction. In the 20 years between 1960 and 1980, the Corsican population rose by over 40% from 170,000 to 240,000 (Talafani 1986, 5), as many Corsicans returned with the purpose of reacquiring and safeguarding the Corsican culture. The riacquistu project has had a double purpose—to resist French cultural and political hegemony on the one hand, and on the other hand, to

reveal and valorize Corsican practices, traditions, language, and way of life unique to the island and the Corsican people that had managed to avoid total extinction by hiding out in the villages, deep in the interior of the island. This drive to shed new light on the Corsican tradition and encourage Corsicans to re-appropriate a *true* sense of their cultural identity has been a remarkably anthropological enterprise. Teams (*équipes*) spread out through the villages and participated in, researched, interviewed, recorded, and documented the ways of yore. The riacquistu has important (if complicated) overlaps with the island's violent nationalist movement, which has demanded political autonomy from the French State since the 1970s.

And, the riacquistu has, in a certain sense, been remarkably successful. The language, the Corsican traditional music, traditional agro-pastoral modes of production, traditional artisanal products, and most loosely but perhaps most passionately, a Corsican "*manière de l'être*" (manner of being) have been filled in with details, and put into books, classrooms, museums, the radio, television, magazines, the newspaper, island craft fairs and celebrations. Representations of the *true* Corsican identity, which show up constantly in the course of an ordinary day—in the newspaper, on the radio and television, in conversations—haven't changed significantly over three decades. A "Big Story" or "grand narrative" (Lyotard, 1979) arose in the wake of the riacquistu, saturating Corsican life with a "*dis*co*urs engagé*" (engaged discourse) that is now the dominant way in which Corsican identity is articulated and defended.

Equally important has been the institutional development that the movement has provoked. As a result of cultural activism, Corsican language pedagogy is now officially part of the island's educational curriculum, with Corsican immersion programs as an

option in elementary schools across the island. The passionate demand to establish a university on the island was met in 1981 with the opening of the *Università di Corsica Pascal Paoli*, and with it a Corsican Studies Major was established. Ethnographic museums detailing a unique Corsican cultural heritage have been funded and built, and local associations devoted to preserving and valorizing Corsica's cultural heritage abound.

Corsican activists in the late 1960s were worried that future generations of Corsicans would know nothing of their "true" identity, and that a folklorized vision of Corsican culture—of bandits and vendetta, of rural destitution and backwardness, presented in travel writing of continental visitors in the 18th and 19th centuries—would be their only cultural legacy. The constant and detailed articulations of the *vrai* (true) Corsican tradition that fill Corsican life, thanks to the riacquistu, have impressively ensured against this.

However, for many cultural militants, today the movement has shifted. And, rather than it being a point of pride for them, these militants feel passionately that the coherent and ubiquitous body of cultural representations they created has corrupted the very cultural authenticity they began trying to reveal 35 years ago. "The culture has been corrupted. In the riacquistu, we lost everything by trying to reacquire ourselves," one informant told me. Another said sadly, "In twenty-five years, it [the real tradition] will be gone. The irony is that before the riacquistu, more people lived in the tradition in their day-to-day lives. Now, with all the efforts—the schools, the museums…people live it less in the everyday."

Based on their experiences over the past three and a half decades, and what is felt to be their failure to "truly" capture the *vrai* tradition, the cultural militants I studied insist that the *vrai* tradition, cultural authenticity *itself,* is not something that can be extracted from life through research and put into books, museums, or even political platforms. Rather, it is something that is *lived.* They express, regretfully, that their efforts aimed at saving the culture over the past few decades may have further alienated the Corsican people from who they *really* are. This has led to a fascinating new genre of identity discourse on the island and equally fascinating new methods of cultural reacquisition, which try to capture the "livingness" that has been lost through, what is locally referred to as, the *patrimonilization,* or the *sacralization* (consecration), or the *muséeification* of the *vrai tradition* (real tradition). Today many militants are simultaneously passionate about the need to defend and assert the *vrai tradition* and constantly dissatisfied by both their explanations as well as any structured attempt they themselves make to embody that tradition.

This dissertation is a detailed ethnographic examination of these newest challenges facing many Corsican cultural militants, and an inquiry into what their struggles reveal about the character of the "authenticity" and "essence" they are trying to express. The recent anthropological scholarship on social movements waged in the name of a group's authentic or essential identity—whether cultural, ethnic, or national—has been heavily influenced by the disciplinary preoccupation with the relationship between culture and power, the politics of representation, and the notion that, in an important sense, all representations of "true" or "authentic" cultural realities are inherently ideological.[i] The Corsican case that this dissertation describes reveals

something different, something that challenges the frames that anthropologists typically apply to such movements.

It is argued that notions of cultural authenticity or essence are problematic because, when we look on the ground for what they refer to, we do *not* find an integral cultural object. There is no homogeneity, no fixity, no "essence." All evidence *undermines* the integrity or wholeness of a "true" cultural object. Instead, what we see is diversity, change, inconsistency, flux, contingency. Life outpouring in real instances, instances that we can observe and participate in, does not match up to convictions about essence, authenticity or "true" culture, and thus, it is concluded, these convictions are *not* representations of the *way things are,* but must come from a different source.

It is as a result of this line of logic that ethnography since the 1980s has increasingly foregrounded heterogeneity, fragmentation, and diversity, and much theoretical argument in cultural anthropology focuses on elaborating the "other source," which is thought to be responsible for the powerful instantiation of ideological beliefs about the "true" or essential order of the world.

I arrived on Corsica expecting to analyze the Corsican movement for cultural revitalization in a similar way. But the longer I lived on the island, and the more I got to know Corsican political and cultural militants personally, the more I became stunned by the difference between the pervasive (and relatively apathetic) world of cultural representations of Corsican culture on the one hand, and the passion and conviction driving Corsican militants on the other. Where the cultural production could often feel artificial and hollow, the Corsican militants I studied really *believe* that there is a foundational and authentic element of their identity, an element that has in fact been

hidden by riacquistu representations, an element that they feel needs expressing now more than ever.

Faced with such passion and conviction in real people, I could not, as much of my anthropological training suggested I should, table the Corsican's ideas of "essence" and "authenticity" and look for what political, economic, or social ends these expressions were aimed at securing or contesting (either consciously or unconsciously). I couldn't begin by looking for *why* they were insisting on their own essence and authenticity, before I knew *what* they were really trying to express. I felt obligated to take them at their word. And this didn't occur to me as some sense of duty but rather as a powerful sense of curiosity about what it was that they were so desperately compelled by. What *is* this "essential" or "authentic" Corsican identity that has preoccupied an entire society for the past 35 years? Why do many now feel that their first round of efforts, which on many counts have been extraordinarily successful, has corrupted rather than expressed who they *really* are? The character of Corsican militancy has been remarkably anthropological in its drive to investigate and document Corsican culture, and given the seemingly similar anxiety expressed by militants and anthropologists over the difference between culture as an outpouring, lived reality and Culture as a documented and analyzed totality; why do Corsicans and anthropologists come to such different conclusions? Corsicans renew their conviction in essence, while anthropologists reject the notion of essence entirely.

So rather than beginning at the end, I began at the beginning, and I went with Corsican militants—on pilgrimages into the mountains, to sheep-shearing parties, to shepherds' folds deep in the interior of the island, to traditional singing circles, on long treks between villages celebrating village saint days, to inter-generational family picnics

thought to be *à la tradition*. I accompanied Corsican militants as they went looking for the authentic, the real, the true, the essential. And I went to the many, many conferences, fairs, performances, cultural groups' planning sessions, political meetings devoted to preserving, articulating and celebrating this truth, and watched as the same militants attempted to articulate, to put on stage, form into arguments, display in vendor booths, videos, and musical CDs, the essence that they (and progressively I) were constantly chasing down.

This dissertation is, in a sense, an account of this journey. Over its course, I began to understand the "essence" that continues to drive many Corsican militants' mission for cultural reacquisition. I began to see why it is both so impossible to simply re-present this essence and also why the Corsicans are so passionately compelled to try. And importantly, I began to believe in it, and see the significant ways anthropological accounts of movements like the riacquistu misunderstand what is going on, when we begin with the assumption that the group essence people passionately insist upon, is not, *cannot* be, Real, in the sense that the people of the movement think it is.

Research Populations: The Village and Cultural Militants

One of my two primary research populations was the community of a village I will call San Petrone, a village in the north of Corsica, where David, Jackson, and I lived during twelve of the fourteen months we were on the island. The small population of approximately forty people ended up being our closest friends, mentors in Corsican social graces, as well as the community we came to be associated with.

My choice of San Petrone as a primary field site was based on its proximity to Corte, the university town in central Corsica, with a population of approximately 6000

people, which has been since the 1970s arguably the most important center of political and cultural activism on the island. It was Corsica's ancient capital and remains a strong symbol of Corsican identity, as well as the location of many riacquistu and nationalist related events.

San Petrone is approximately 20 miles north of Corte, up an impossibly windy road into the mountains. It is typical of the 276 rural villages that are scattered throughout the island's interior and whose isolation results in a very tight micro-community. The demographics of the village mirror those of the island as a whole. Roughly 40% of the population is retired, and among the working-age residents, a variety of occupations are represented—a restaurant owner, a national-park worker, an elementary school teacher, a nurse, a shepherd, a construction worker, among others. A small proportion of residents are nationalists, and the others are divided in political affiliation between the UMP (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*) (Union for a People's Movement) a center-right party and the PRG (*Parti Radical de Gauche*) (Radical Party of the Left), a social-liberal party. A handful of villagers live in one of the larger cities during the week and return to the village on the weekends. And, like all Corsican villages, the population of San Petrone swells (to three times its size) in the summer months when extended family members return.

Unlike some of the most remote villages on Corsica, though, San Petrone is close enough to the main road that I was able to leave with relative ease to attend events in other parts of the island (once I got used to driving faster than a nervous crawl around the hairpin turns bordered by treacherous drops on one side). Ultimately, I could make it to Corte in 20 minutes, to Bastia, the large port city on the northwest coast, in just over an

hour, and to Ajaccio, Corsica's capital city on the southwest coast of the island, in about two hours.

As we will see in Chapter II, individuals on Corsica identify primarily with an extended network of family and friends, the locus of which is the village. The relationship between an individual and his quasi kin-based network is one of collective loyalty and honor; and most social, economic, and political negotiations of individuals rely heavily on their network. Without a network on Corsica, one is in a large sense invisible and irrelevant, which for an anthropologist trying to gain access to meaningful worlds can prove an exceptional difficulty. Thus, much of my effort went into earning the trust of our villagers and becoming accepted as a part of that group. It was through this very local engagement that I became intimately familiar with Corsican social organization, the role of the clan on the island, and the ways in which people's passionate feelings about Corsican identity and tradition extend well beyond the limits of nationalist politics and riacquistu representations.

In addition to our close-knit village community, my second population of study was a portion of the active community of cultural militants across the island who are dedicated to the revitalization and valorization of Corsican tradition, identity and language. There are approximately 20,000 cultural associations that exist today, with over half the island's population involved at some level in associative activity (Bithell, 2007, 114). The vast majority of associations on Corsica are devoted to some aspect of the preservation, transmission and valorization of Corsican heritage. I estimate the population of active cultural militants to be 3000 today. While the majority of Corsicans are involved in some sort of cultural activism, the population of cultural militants I am

concerned with are those whose lives revolve around it. This includes the founders of particularly active associations and those whose employment revolves around some realm of cultural revitalization (professors of Corsican language at the University, the director of the Center for Traditional Music, editors at a publishing house devoted to the production of works in Corsican or about Corsican culture, or shepherds devoted to the traditional modes of production). However, not all cultural militants are members of associations or professionally involved in the preservation of the patrimoine. Included in my estimate of active militants are those who have ordinary day jobs (an owner of a small sports equipment business, a soft-drink delivery man, a worker at a video store, a professional trek guide) but spend virtually all their free time participating in tradition-related activities—gatherings centered around traditional singing or making traditional delicacies, cultivating their own land to remain close to the ways of yore, hunting wild boar, trekking between villages, etc. Though they had no affiliation, per se, these individuals were a constant presence at the events where the tradition was celebrated.

In general, active cultural militants have Nationalist political leanings, though as a result of the trajectory of the Nationalist movement over the past few decades (as we will see in subsequent chapters), many have distanced themselves from politics altogether. The majority are men between the ages of 20 and 65.

Groups of activists, as is typical of all groups on Corsica, are brought together most often by where they are from, their village or micro-region. Militant singers tend to sing with members of their local communities, cultural associations are most frequently based around the village or cluster of local villages. My own research centered around approximately 300 militants living in villages in the North of the island between Corte

and Bastia, primarily in the *Arrondissement de Corte*, a population of approximately 30,000 people. This area includes part of the Castagniccia, the Bozio**,** the Balagna and Niolo regions. However, on many occasions, I attended events that brought militants together from the north and the south, from villages of virtually every region on Corsica—celebrated artisanal fairs (*foires),* annual conferences held by the more established cultural associations, or events considered to be particularly à la tradition*,* like the pilgrimages to San Bartuli or Sain'Alesiu or San Cervioni, where the traditional singing is thought to be *really good.* These events put me in contact with a much larger community of cultural militants.

I got to know and interviewed Corsican language activists, shepherds, singers in militant musical groups, traditional musicians, instrument makers, wood workers, Corsican poets, publishers, ethnographic museum curators, founders of village associations devoted to the preservation of the patrimoine, as well as the island's icons of the cultural and nationalist movements. Over time it became clear that many of the individuals, whom I had met in these very different contexts, knew each other, often very well. My network snowballed as the number of personal connections I had at the outset led to more introductions, to more interviews, to more connections, etc. And, over time, I began to recognize people whom I had already interviewed when I attended activist-oriented events, and they began to recognize me.

My anthropological interest in Corsican culture and identity made me relevant to this group of activists—we were, in some sense, looking to understand the same thing. I began to receive invitations to meetings of activist associations, colloquiums dedicated to patrimoine-related issues, traditional theatrical and musical performances.

In these contexts, I became very familiar with the pervasive *discourse engage* (engaged discourse). But it was the personal relationships and experiences that emerged over time from these connections in more informal events and discussions with less public figures, at *merendellas* (the Corsican word for family picnics), village festivities, and "sacred" pilgrimages, that I began to get a real sense of my informants' troubled commitment to their Corsican identity and the tradition.

My research was dominated by my participation in riacquistu (and, to a certain extent, nationalist) related activities. I also took a Corsican language course at the university, for exposure to the Corsican language but also to observe the transmission of cultural heritage in today's context. I interviewed (formally and informally) approximately 200 cultural militants. I conducted an extended set of focus groups among university students in which we discussed their perception of the *vrai* tradition, the riacquistu, etc. And I was granted access to municipal archives in which I was able to track the expansion of riacquistu-related associations and publications over the past 40 years. All of my research was conducted in French, which over time became sprinkled with Corsican phrases and words, typical of local discourse patterns. Many of the names of interviewees and locations have been changed to protect people's privacy.

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter One, I will give an overview of Corsica—its geography, population, economy, history, social structure, etc. In Chapter Two, I will focus on a description of the Corsican's social world and the role of the *non dit* in Corsican life. In Chapter Three, I turn to a description of the riacquistu, its history, cultural production, the discours engagé, and its relationship to the Nationalist movement. In this chapter, I will also look

at the history of the Nationalist movement on the island and the reasons why much of the Corsican population has distanced itself from the Nationalist agenda but not necessarily from their belief in a unique Corsican identity in need of preservation and valorization.

In Chapter Four, I will consider how nationalist movements and movements for cultural revitalization, particularly those arising in the West in the late 20th century, have typically been understood by anthropologists. I will look at the arguments that ground the anthropological understanding of invented traditions, imagined communities, and ideological constructions of Essence and Truth. I argue that movements like the riacquistu have been generally seen as an extension of (or reaction to) a highly problematic mode of truth production characteristic of Enlightenment rationalism.

Chapters Five and Six give a detailed ethnographic account of the discourse, activities, concerns, of the population of cultural militants I studied. Through the analysis of extensive interviews and examples, I suggest that the belief in an essential Corsican identity and tradition espoused by these militants does not conform to the pattern of analysis described in Chapter Four. I identify a vision of cultural essence and authenticity driving these cultural militants' passionate engagement, which is not based in homogeneity or fixity, but in notions of spontaneity, organic emergence and irreproducibility.

In Chapter Six, I look specifically at examples of the ways in which Corsican militants feel they constantly corrupt this "essence" in their very efforts to valorize and articulate it. In light of their constant struggle for articulation, I consider influential scholarship in anthropology and philosophy that is preoccupied with similar questions about the relationship between the representation and the thing itself, between the

analytic and the ordinary, between the essential and the contingent. By working through these theoretical approaches to problems, which are of a very similar nature to those faced by the Corsican militants I studied, what the militants are struggling with becomes ever clearer. Finally, we look in particular at how Bourdieu's understanding of doxa and ideology, which has been highly influential in anthropological suspicion of cultural essence, misses what some of the other theories reveal about the Corsican struggle.

Reflections

Ethnography comes to life through accounts of particular people, their actions and beliefs, their particular and unique voices, voices that one would not have heard had one not been, for example, speaking that particular language, at that particular moment, in that village at the top of that mountain on that island in the middle of that sea. This is what makes anthropological work different from other social scientific endeavors. The fieldworker confronts this particularity, the singular presence of individuals, cultures and existences that he studies. As much as she yearns for hints that transcend the particular conversation, to allow her to make sense of what is going on, she is in fact in direct contact with a certain, non-generalizable feature of her subject matter—the people and their lives are simply not reducible to the sense we make of them.

The anthropologist writes down what she learns from the top of that mountain in the sea, tucks the voices neatly into sentences, punctuates them, anchors them with quotation marks. The question that plagues the anthropologist is what does that order, that printed word, that articulation do to the voices? Does it betray them, "kill" them as the Australian Murngin say of the ritual process of naming in which things "achieve articulateness, but at the cost of their lives" (Shore 1996, 221)? This dilemma is shared

by the anthropologist and the local Corsican activist, who both seek to reclaim an elusive sense of cultural life.

Anthropologists have argued that by identifying the essential features of a culture and naming it Culture, rather than attending to the dynamic, ever-changing and overlapping interlocking web-like nature of culture, we risk misunderstanding our subject. The reality we paint becomes a still life, and the splattering that our observations make when they hit the page are tidied up, edited out, and a fundamental aspect of cultural reality is lost. With the important possibility of this misunderstanding in mind, we as anthropologists are encouraged to contest the totalizing frames of Culture, Truth, Reality, and Identity. We must, it is said, try to depict the living, breathing presence of human existence and not pretend it fits nicely into the categories, the words or the grammar through which we digest and re-present it. We have been called on to leave the breath in the work.

Interestingly, due to the deluge of totalizing, identity-oriented frames on Corsica as a result of the riacquistu—the codification of the "true" Corsican language in grammar books; an ever-present grand narrative; constant efforts in the local media to put traditional artisanship, music, village life in the public eye and to valorize it; nationalist political discourse identifying the Corsican nation—in perhaps more grounded and pressing ways than the anthropologist at her desk, Corsicans are confronted with the insufficient relationship between the breath inherent to their cultural existence and the frames that claim it. Anthropologists edit and tighten their ethnographies and then struggle to deconstruct their own coherence in introductions and conclusions overflowing with claims about the non-totality of what they've understood, seen, and written. But

when a Corsican feels the deep insufficiency of the frames that have been actively produced to contain him (often produced by his own hand!), there is no place for an introduction to soothe his anxiety.

In this ethnographic investigation, we look carefully at today's cultural militants' efforts to valorize essential Corsican identity as well as the perpetual self-critique about why these valorizations are insufficient. The kinds of concerns Corsican militants express, rather than the stock version of essentialism often attributed to nationalist and ethnic militants in anthropological analyses, are in fact postmodern ones. And this, I believe, is not an odd Corsican breed of essentialism, but something that likely extends to other shores.

Rather than undermining essence in principle, the Corsican struggle significantly shifts how we understand it—pulling it from the depths towards the surface. The kind of knowledge that arises when one gives one's life to an utterly particular place, path, and set of circumstances (which one always does) is knowledge that makes cultural worlds meaningful rather than static lexicons or blueprints. And this is *not* to assert the inevitable subjectivity of all truths. Rather it is to claim that beneath (or above, or simultaneous to) the structures that our categorical minds produce to analyze and make sense of the world is a pulsing non-categorical character, a quickening, that grounds these structures as meaningful. Without this meaning, "truths" and "realities" would cease to pulse; their light would go out.

Over the course of my 14 months of research, I watched as Corsican militants struggled to indicate this essential, non-categorical character of their own existence, and

despite their inability to point to it, or identify it empirically, continued to believe in its existence. And ultimately, I believed it as well.

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[i] The trend in anthropological scholarship has been influenced by Bourdieu's theory of practice (1999), in particular his notions of *habitus* and *doxa*. In addition, the Foucauldian notions of *discourse*, *power*, *epistemes*, and the *archeology of knowledge* have been influential (1969, 1971, 1975). In anthropology, the notion that all representations of cultural reality are ideological hit home in the "crisis of representation" beginning in the 1980s, in which anthropologists influenced by Marcus and Fisher (1986), came to question Culture as a coherent object of study.

Chapter I
Corsican Essentials

Corsica is situated in the Mediterranean Sea's Gulf of Genoa, 170 kilometers south of France's Cote d'Azur and 95 kilometers west of Piombino, Italy. At 183 km long and 83 km wide, Corsica is the smallest of the islands in the occidental Mediterranean Sea. Its surface area of 8,680 square km is significantly less than those of neighboring Sicily and Sardinia, which are 25,708 square kilometers and 24,090 square kilometers, respectively. (*Tableaux de l'économie champardennaise* (TEC), Insee, 2005) With a population of 294,000 and a population density of 30 people per square kilometer, Corsica is approximately half as densely populated as Sardinia and one sixth as densely populated as Sicily.

Today, two port cities are the population hubs on the island—Ajaccio, the capital city, on the southwest coast with approximately 64,000 residents, and Bastia on the northeast coast with approximately 44,000 residents. Over the past 15 years, communities close to these two poles have experienced particularly rapid demographic growth. However, despite the significant urban population, 276 of the island's 360 communes are rural villages, 61% of which have fewer than 200 inhabitants. (TEC, 2005)

Many Corsicans maintain dual residence, working in one of the cities during the week, and returning to their villages on weekends, holidays, and in the summer. As Caroline Bithell (2007) puts it, "Villages are not permanent deserts…it is perfectly normal for families to maintain two homes, one an apartment in town…where parents have their employment and children attend the *college* or *lycée,* the other the village home to which they return…"(13). When asked where they are from, people nearly

always refer to their family's village. In everyday discussions, one frequently hears people talking about "*monter au village*" (going up to the village). The population is still defined, as it was traditionally (see below), by the movement from the mountains to the coast and the coast to the mountains. And, although the trend towards the urban hubs dominates demographic flows, rural village populations increased between 1990-1999 by 4% (TEC, 2005).

Corsica is the least industrialized region in France, and among the poorest. Corsica imports 90% of its food, 100% of its fuel, as well as the majority of consumer goods from mainland (Jaffe 1999). In 2009, the gross domestic product per inhabitant was 24,000 Euros compared with the national average of 30,000 Euros (Insee, 2011).

The island population is aging, with one inhabitant in four older than 60 years old. However since 1999, except for the 20-29 year olds who tend to leave the region to go to the university and look for their first jobs on the continent, the migratory pattern back to the island has been positive in all other age ranges, 1.8% per year as opposed to .7% nationally (TEC, 2005).

30% of Corsicans in the active population are employed in the public sector by the French State, which is 8% above the national average. Commercial services (dominated by tourism) account for approximately 52% of the island's economic activity, followed by construction at 11%. Industry and agriculture combined represent a mere 6.4%.

The majority of private sector employees are low-level professionals who work in commerce (sales people, shop assistants, cashiers, etc.) or hotels, restaurants, and health-related fields. (TEC 2005, 54). Manual workers, the majority working in

construction, make up 20% of the work force, as opposed to 26% at the national level. Tradesmen (plumbers, electricians, painters, carpenters, etc.), shop owners, and business owners account for 10% of workforce. Approximately 9% of workers fall into the category of upper-level professionals. Ajaccio, Bastia, and their surrounding suburbs are the most significant hubs of French administration as well as where the majority of commercial enterprises are based. Following those centers in commercial activity are the coastal areas of Porto Vecchio, Ile Rousse, and the University town of Corte (TEC 54-60).

Despite Corsica's feeble economy, the cost of living is 1.5% higher on the island than on mainland France. In 2010, Insee reported that the cost of food and non-alcoholic beverages on Corsica was 8.6% higher; clothes and shoes 1.2% higher; gas, water, electricity was 5.2% higher than their equivalents on the continent.

Since the late 19th century Corsica has benefited from a *statut fiscal particulier* (special tax status) designed to help the Corsican economy. Taxes on certain products are reduced for island inhabitants, to compensate for the costs of transport. The French State complements the Corsican regional budget with significant national funds. In 2009 Corsica received 284 million Euros from the French state (Projet de Loi de Finances Pour 2009). Since 1986, Corsica has also benefited from the EU funds for rural development in programs such as Leader+.

Topography

Topographically, Corsica is very diverse. Often referred to as "*une montagne dans la mer"* (a mountain in the sea) Corsica has an average altitude of 568 meters, and its highest peak, Monte Cinto, is 2,710 meters. Approximately half of the island is made

up of densely packed granite mountains. These mountains descend into coastal plains, which extend to the Mediterranean. Rocky coasts make up 750 kilometers of Corsica's 1047 kilometers of coastline, 16,000 acres of which is protected from development by the *Conservatoire du littoral et des rivages lacustres* (Coastal and Lakeshore Conservancy) (TEC, 2005). A major mountain range runs from the northeast to the southwest of the island, dividing the island geographically in two. During the middle ages, under Genoese rule (see below), the northeast of the island, which was the more densely populated, was called in Corsican, *Terra quà da i monti,* (land of this side of the mountains), and the southwest the *Terra là da i monti* (land of the other side of the mountains). Emerging from the central ridge is a network of rivers partitioning the island into many micro-regions.

Three climatic zones exist: the mountainous zone of high forests and alpine pastures, which experiences heavy precipitation and long winters; the intermediate zone, which has moderate rainfall and short winters; and the coastal plains, which have long dry summers. These zones support a variety of vegetation from laricio pine, sweet chestnut, cork-oak, and eucalyptus, to grapes, clementine, lemons, peaches, figs and olives. Corsica is often referred to as the "scented island" because of the widespread island *maquis,* fragrant shrubbery that covers approximately two-thirds of the island, made up of briar, broom, heather, lavender, lentisk, rockrose, arbutus, and myrtle (Wilson 1988).

The mountains, rivers, and the late arrival of roads (many villages weren't accessible by road until the mid 20th century) has resulted in the significant isolation of clusters of villages, known as *pieves,* nestled in the valleys of the mountainous interior.

These villages were only accessible by foot or mule for most of their history and were basically shut off from each other because of snow all winter and swollen rivers all spring. However, they've never been totally isolated, and inter-regional barter was an important feature of the traditional economy. Oil, cheese, chestnut flour, wooden/leather articles, and livestock were exchanged in regional fairs, to which people travelled with great effort (Ravis-Giordani 2004).

History

The history of Corsica is one of constant invasion and occupation in which the indigenous population has been continually oppressed and exploited. The island was conquered by the Greeks in 565BC, the Carthaginians 300 years later, and then taken over by the Roman Empire, which held power for 500 years, during which time Latin and Christianity infused the local culture. After the fall of Rome, Corsica was invaded by the Vandals, the Byzantine Empire, the Ostrogoths, the Lombards and the Saracens (Moors). Pisa and Genoa launched a joint attack in the early 11th century, and Pisa then ruled and colonized the island from the late 11th century to the end of the 13th century, replacing Latin with Italian as the primary language. In 1284, the Genoese expelled the Pisans and became harsh rulers of the Corsican people for the next 600 years. These invading powers rarely extended their influence beyond the coastal towns, which were insignificant centers of the Corsican population. By the mid 19th century, only 17% of Corsicans lived in coastal towns, and this was *after* a period of urban growth (Jaffe 1999, Andreani 2004, Wilson 1988).

In the 18th century, because of economic depression and heavy taxation by the Genoese state, under the leadership of the Corsican patriot Pascal Paoli, the population

rose in revolt against the Genoese powers. Soliciting help from France in 1756, Paoli's army succeeded in defeating the Genoese and liberating the island temporarily. Paoli declared Corsica an independent nation, established a democratic government and universal suffrage, wrote a constitution (with the aid of Jean-Jacques Rousseau), opened a university in the town of Corte, challenged the dominant system of family and clan-based politics, and created a Corsican currency. But independence lasted just 14 years. In the treaty of Versailles (1768), the French, undermining its allegiance to the Corsican cause, officially bought the island from the Genoese. After a short-lived violent resistance, aided briefly by the English, Corsica was defeated at the battle of Ponto Novu in 1769 and has remained French since. For Corsicans today, Paoli is considered the "*babbu di a patria*" (Corsican for: father of the homeland), and his reign is a symbol of their struggle for cultural and political sovereignty. (Andreani 2004, Arrighi 2002, Dressler 2007).

Language

The indigenous Corsican language (*Corse* in French, *u corsu o*r *Lingua Corsa* in Corsican), which developed from Latin (with a few notable pre-Latin traces), and was heavily influenced by Tuscan Italian between the 11th and 18th centuries, has been preserved in the interior villages. There is variation between micro-regions on the island, and in particular between the north and the south of the island.[ii]

With the efforts of cultural militants over the past three and a half decades, the Corsican language has found its way into schools, books, newspapers, and local media. However, it remains on Unesco's list of potentially endangered languages. Studies conducted on the prevalence of Corsican spoken today report varying results. In 1977, in an Insee poll asking heads of households about their family's Corsican use, 79% declared

themselves to speak Corsican, 69% of said their wives or partners spoke Corsican, and 59% said their children spoke Corsican; 33% declared they knew how to write in Corsican. (Arrighi 2002, 83)

A study conducted by *Observatioire Interrégional du Politique* in 1995 found 81% of island people reported themselves able to understand Corsican, 64% said they spoke it, and 57% claimed to be able to read the language.

A study conducted in 2001 and 2002, among elementary school teachers in Haute Corse, reported lower levels of language competency. 13% of those polled reported not understanding Corsican, 43% understood but had a hard time expressing themselves in Corsican, and 44% reported speaking Corsican. (Moracchini 2004, 117)

A study of a student population in 1984 in 5 junior high schools across the island reported that the percentage of students who reported speaking Corsican regularly ranged from 0% in one school to 11% in another. The percentages of those who reported speaking Corsican to their brothers and sisters was much higher, ranging from 16.8% to 57% at the highest. Those whose reported that their grandparents spoke Corsican among themselves ranged from 44%-78%. Parents were reported to speak Corsican less frequently between each other than grandparents, ranging from 34%-72%, although they were generally thought to have the capacity (61%-81%). The percentage of parents reported to speak *only* Corsican to their children was 0-19%, but 27%-53% were reported to speak both Corsican and French. 31%-62% were reported to only speak French to their children. The majority of students interviewed considered that "there are spaces or circumstance where one must speak Corsican" (Arrighi 2002, 84).

Jaffe argues that one must factor into these results the effect of language ideology on Corsica, and the ways in which it is foregrounded as a marker of Corsican identity (1999). As Jaffe puts it, people are greatly affected "by the judgments of cultural authenticity attached to linguistic production in Corsican" (1999, 8). The ideological component of Corsican use powerfully affects the ways in which speakers consider their own competency.[iii]

Traditional Social Structure and Economy

Despite a major decline in island agriculture over the past half century, the indigenous people of the island, who are known in French as *le people Corse* and in Corsican *u Populu Corsu,* have traditionally been agro-pastoral. Though the villages were the centers of traditional life, village populations tended to own land both in the high-mountains and the plains, allowing Corsicans to exploit a variety of types of land over a wide area, supporting an economy based on agriculture, arboriculture, horticulture and pastoralism. Each year, village populations temporarily inhabited coastal satellites, as land on the plains was plowed and sowed, then returned to their villages, and then descended again during the harvest. The high mountains were used by shepherds during the summer months, in the traditional practice of transhumance. (Wilson, 1988)

Due to population growth through the beginning of the 19th century, (the island population doubled from 140,000 to 280,000 between 1780-1867), the amount of land under cultivation tripled, and there was a shift towards sedentarization (Wilson 1988,9-10). At this point, many of the satellite coastal villages became permanent, though people's ties to their natal villages were not severed. Today, many coastal villages still bear the names of their original villages. The urban population was minimal on Corsica

until the 20th century. The port cities, populated mostly by Genoese transplants, barely surpassed 5,000 people throughout the 19th century (Renucci 1974, 62). And as mentioned above, only 17% of the population lived in coastal towns until the middle of the 19th century.

On the one hand, traditional Corsican life was marked by egalitarianism and communalism. There is a powerful history of collective land use on the island, which even persists today in some areas. In the 1571 *Statuti Civili e Criminali* (Civil and Criminal Statute) the Genoese codified the traditional practice of land sharing. It was declared that open lands on the island belonged to all Corsicans. On the other hand, in practice, each village and pieve set out to define the boundaries of their own territory, which belonged to *their* community members only (Cool 2001, 736). Villages were composed of local kin-groups. Traditional family households typically were constituted of a married couple and their many children (often 8-12). Children, particularly males, were important assets for a family, as they made up the workforce of the household. (Cool 2001). First and second cousin bilateral marriage was preferred (Barrett 1984, 140), though marriages were also used to make alliances between unrelated (and often feuding) families.

Some communal land was the property of the village as a corporate entity and was leased out, *en bloc,* to individuals in the community. Other land could be used by anyone and was considered a common asset, like water, wood, etc. Villages were typically divided in 3 parts—land fit for cultivation (*presa*), land fit for arboriculture (*circolo*), and land used for pasture. In some regions of the island, the *presa* would be distributed among heads of families in an annual community meeting, but more often families would

claim plots within the designated area by clearing it and roughly enclosing it. They informally retained rights as long as they continued to cultivate it. Land was exploited under a collectively administered system of annual rotation and irrigation. Plowing, irrigation, and harvesting were all communally regulated. (Cool 2001, Wilson 1988, Chiva 1963)

Over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, families began increasingly to take over communal land for private use, and more and more land became privatized. However, the communal ethos remained. Land, to this day, is generally considered the property of the family, the "*patrimoine familial* " (family heritage), rather than the property of an individual. The traditional inheritance patterns, in which family land was passed on to a single heir in order to maintain its integrity, changed under the French civil code of the late 18th and 19th centuries when the equal inheritance of all children became law. Corsicans long resisted this change, with varying success.

On Corsica today, the French inheritance codes have resulted in two general, and very different, scenarios in regard to land ownership. On the one hand there is now extreme fragmentation of property. As Cool puts it (2001), "in some instances an individual may own one room in a house or a single branch of a tree with the bulk of the property divided among several other kinsmen and unrelated descendants of village inhabitants"(735). This property is basically valueless. The opposite also exists, when property is held in the name of a single dead person, and in order to sell the property, one must identify and locate *all* the heirs of X and arrange a mutually agreed upon settlement, which is such a laborious process that it becomes almost impossible to sell any land. As a result, today the family patrimoine is generally not divided, but held in common by all

heirs who are allowed to use it (Cool 2001). In 2009, it was reported that between 40 and 45% of Corsican land had no title, or was in the state of indivision. (Corse Matin, Nov 12, 2010). In reality, this means that most land, except for the gardens that are located near to the village, lies fallow, overgrown by maquis, and houses fall into disrepair.

Social Structure and the Clan

Corsica's traditional egalitarian social structure continued to be powerful even with the increase in private property. According to Wilson (1988), in the 18th and 19th centuries, virtually all Corsicans owned some land, a grape vine, and a garden, though the majority of this ownership was small-scale. Generally people worked their own land. Though this was the norm, there was some large-scale property ownership. Throughout the middle ages, this was more true of the southwest portion of the island—the *Terra là da i Monti*. During Genoese rule, the mountain ridge dividing the north and south of the island also marked a larger political boundary. The south, referred to as the *Terra de i Signori* (land of the lords), long maintained a feudal structure and remained in the hands of local lords. Ravis-Giordani (1979) argues that these nobles were characterized less by great wealth (they owned large amounts of land, but it wasn't always economically productive), as by the closed, endogamous character of the dominant class. These lords often employed masses of agricultural workers, in a patron-client relation. The north, referred to as *Terra di Commune* (land of communes) was dominated by communal land ownership.

In areas where land was primarily owned in common, there was little official social stratification, although a social distinction was made between those who could live off their property and those who had to complement this income with other work, the

latter being looked down upon. However, in lieu of nobles, in this egalitarian context, "bosses" rose to power. The power of dominant families was based on their size and their ability to use physical force to gain privileged access to communal resources. The ethos of Corsica's traditional egalitarian structure was fraught with competition, conflict, and violence, long expressed in the practice of feuding and vendetta. Conflicts occurred over material interests, especially land, because property rights were uncertain, and few people possessed official land titles. But disputes arose just as often due to injuries to family or individual honor, as well as intra-familial conflict and inter-community conflict.

Feuding took place on Corsica until the 1930s. According to Wilson's study of feuding on Corsica throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, feuds most frequently arose between the dominant families in villages and towns. Sometimes feuds were between as many as 3 families, but most typically it was two. Feuds were equally prevalent in both the rural population and in "noble" families. Corsica, Wilson argues, has always been a society of "pervasive factionalism"(1988, 305), due to the character of local competition. The process of feuding included intimidating tactics, such as the destruction of property and the killing of livestock, which often escalated to the assault and killing of family members. When the conflicts got to this level of intensity, villages could be devastated—houses would be barricaded, streets abandoned. People feared for their lives. Men always went to the fields carrying weapons. Feuds between societal factions would continue (at different degrees of intensity) over the course of many generations.

It has been argued that rather than being a form of unregulated conflict, feuding in traditional societies acts as a system of "primitive law," resulting in part from the absence of a central authority (Boehm 1984, Lewis 1961). Intra-familial conflict could be offset

by kin participation in a feud against another family, and inter-familial conflict could be offset by the community solidarity felt when inter-village feuding broke out. From this point of view, feuding could have "a socially integrative function at one segmental level, while being disruptive at another" (Wilson 1988, 415). With the introduction of state control in the island interior, during the early period of French rule, police, courts, and the law of the state increasingly replaced this traditional mode of social control. However, the state's rule did *not* replace the traditional kin-based feuding practices. Rather, the two modes co-existed and ultimately mapped onto each other in a problematic way important for understanding today's social and political structure on the island.

In 1882, French administrative practices reached the inner villages, and mayors were elected directly by the village population (Renucci 1974). The mayor had administrative, policing and judicial functions, and controlled the communal assets of the village. Not surprisingly, the goal of competing Corsican families became, as Bourde described it, to gain "the mayor's seal of office, for it is this which procures most for them in terms of immediate gains" (1887, 82). Municipal posts were typically distributed among kinsmen. The mayor would take over common land and encourage his kinsmen and supporters to do the same, and as long as the mayor retained control, nothing could be done to combat the land grab. Similar favors were granted to a mayor's supporters in the form of grazing rights for livestock, the falsification of registers of births, marriages, deaths etc., exemption from taxes or fines, etc. In addition to nonviolent abuses of power, mayors were frequently involved in violent feuding, which often occurred in the context of open or formal political competition. The mayor became a benefactor or a patron not only to his extended family but also to all the families that supported him electorally. As

Wilson puts it, political rivalry and feuding were arguably "different modes of conducting the same struggle within a village" (307). Family groups during this time came to be referred to as parties—the *partitu* (for the dominant group) and *contrapartitu* (contesting party). (Wilson 1988, Chiva 1963)

Local village politics flooded into the larger system by way of the municipal elections. In a system similar to the mayoral elections, influential heads of households offered various benefits to extended networks of family and friends in return for votes. In this sense, "a modern system of representation…was adapted to a society where ties of kinship and patronage were paramount."(Wilson 324). Mayors helped candidates in the regional and general elections get votes, and the candidates returned the favor. This resulted in a pyramidal structure in which the local divisiveness of the village mapped onto the larger political structures all the way up to the nation-state.

This patronage network, which has been described locally using the French terms "clan" or "clanism," is on the one hand an alternative to the bureaucratic organization of the state; on the other hand it colludes with the state for its power. In the Corsican patronage system, characteristic of traditional societies where central control is weak, local political officials have a monopoly on state resources, which they channel to their followers, and the state is assured of a certain amount of loyalty, local information, and votes at the national level. Clanism is, from this point of view, a traditional/modern hybrid in which values of kinship, alliance, friendship, and economic and political obligation overlap.

This system has largely prevailed through the changes in French governance over the last century and a half. Today, on Corsica, as in other French regions, villages or

village clusters (called *communes*) are grouped into larger units called *cantons,* which are in turn grouped into *départements*, which are the constitutive units of a French region. To this day, the most powerful administrative posts on the island are occupied by families who have the greatest influence over the greatest region—tapping into the local factionalisms to gain support and grant favors.

In 1970, Corsica officially became the 22nd region of France (previously it was a département). It was divided into 2 départements in 1975, *Haute Corse* ("Upper" or Northern Corsica) and *Corse du Sud* (Southern Corsica), with the island's main mountain ridge as the rough boundary between the two. Haute Corse is divided into 30 cantons, which include 236 communes. Corse du Sud comprises 22 cantons, and 122 communes. Each commune is administered by a municipal council, a mayor, and the mayor's assistants. Each département is run by a General Council (*Conseil Général*) with one representative elected from each canton. These representatives elect a president who is the executive of the council. (TEC 2005, 20-27). Corsica's two départements are typically dominated by the most powerful family in the north and the most powerful family in the south. Today, the major clan families, who have been in power for generations, are the Giacobbi family in the north and the Rocca Serra family in the south. (Andreani 2004, 93).

Contemporary politics on Corsica has been dominated by the Nationalist movement that arose in the late 1960s, which is discussed in detail in Chapter III. Built into the nationalist movement's overarching struggle for political autonomy from the French state has been the contestation of the deeply entrenched clan structure, which, nationalists argue has made the island politically and economically dependent on State

resources. In the 1980s, as France attempted to quell the increasingly violent nationalist activity on the island, Corsica was granted a *statut particulière* (special status). And, in 1982, it became France's first *Collectivité Territorial.* The collectivity is an administrative body made up of three organs, the Corsican Assembly, the Executive Council and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council. Fifty-one members of the Corsican assembly are elected directly, through universal suffrage, to serve for 6 years.[iv] The Assembly has markedly more autonomy than other regional administrative bodies. In part, the hope was that this representative body would challenge the dominant political structure born out of traditional clan allegiances. This has, in large part, been ineffective.[v]

In the first elections in 1982, because of the relevance of the traditional clans in Corsica, several parties ran, and fourteen different groups gained representation in the assembly, divided primarily based on personal rather than ideological reasons. The conservative groups got 45% of the votes. The left-leaning parties won 35.5% of the votes. And the Socialist Party, which traditionally has done poorly in island politics, obtained just 2 seats. Those running as nationalist candidates, arguably the only ideologically based candidates and outside the traditional clan structure, gained 15% of the votes and 9 seats. However, this did not last. In the second elections, the nationalist party lost 6 of the 9 seats. (Balaguer 2007, 7-8) And, over the course of the last 30 years, Corsican nationalism has been unable to provide a true alternative to the clan structure, its representation in the assembly typically hovering around 10%. Moreover, the nationalist movement has increasingly begun playing by the rules of the clan system, using personal connections and alliances to further the nationalist agenda (Balaguer 2007,

Dressler 2004). Despite the lack of representation of the Nationalists in the assembly, many aspects of the Nationalist movement's agenda—the desire for the recognition of a unique Corsican identity, the desire for the revival and valorization of the Corsican language and traditional culture, the resistance to typical tourist and costal development, the dissatisfaction with the clan system—are widespread across the island. The trajectory of the Nationalist movement over the past 35 years, for many reasons, has made it an unwelcome vehicle for these prevalent concerns, and the reasons for this will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Decline of the Tradition

At the turn of the 20th century, an agricultural crisis ravaged the island, and the two world wars crippled the island's male population (an estimated 20,000 Corsicans died), leading to the demise of the "traditional way of life." With few left to cultivate family land or to tend to the flocks, the traditional Corsican economy was left in ruins. France made very minimal efforts to industrialize Corsica, establishing a few unsuccessful asbestos and lead mines in the 1920s. As a result, nearly half a million Corsicans emigrated from Corsica during the first half of the 20th century, searching for employment. A vast proportion went to the French colonies, where many found work as administrators. By 1950, Corsicans, then only 1% of France's population, composed 20% of colony administrators (Crettiez 1999, 204). Young people were encouraged to learn French and to leave the island for a "better life." This led to a de-valorization of traditional life. The Corsican language, traditions, and modes of production, became markers of the underdeveloped, and the destitute.

In 1954, the population had dropped from the 300,000 inhabitants at end of the 19th century to 191,500 inhabitants. (TEC, 2005) After WWII, the population slowly began to grow again, and it has almost returned to its pre-20th century high. However, the traditional kin-group has been greatly altered. Today, 30% of households include a couple with children, but only 5% of those households have 3 children, and only 2% have more than three. An equal 30% of men and women live alone. These single-occupancy residences are typically inhabited by women over 70 and men between 30-59 (TEC 2005, 38). Today, about half of the population over 15 years of age is married, and one marriage in 3 constitutes a remarriage for one or both the members. In the past 10 years, the rate of divorce has raised from 400 couples to 600 per year, resulting in an increasing number of single parent households. Typically the children live with the mother. (TEC 2005, 46-49)

And, people are no longer confined to the close quarters of the village. Though people's networks of friends and alliances remain strongly rooted in their extended family and the relations in their pieve that go back generations, these networks have loosened and become more vaguely defined to include (and exclude) people from many other realms of daily life. We will look at this in detail in the next chapter.

Since the late 1960s, cultural and political life on the island has been defined by efforts to revitalize Corsica's economy, to revive the tradition that was largely suppressed during the 20th century, and to acquire increased political autonomy from the French State. This complex of problems has come to be referred to in the scholarly literature on Corsica, but also by the French government and the French press, as "*Le Problème Corse*," (The Corsican Problem) or "*La Question Corse*" (The Corsican Question).

Modern Corsica looks markedly different from what it looked like half a century ago, and Corsicans are not content with many of the changes, but competing values make it difficult to find a way forward (or back). In Chapter III, we will begin our investigation into the riacquistu: what the movement for cultural reacquisition has gained and what the cost of those gains has been.

[ii] For more information on the Corsican langauge see, Jaffe (1999), Blackwood (2004), (2007).

[iii] Jaffe's works shows the prevalence of Corsican-French hybrids in ordinary talk. On the one hand, this can be evidence of code-switching, in which speaking Corsican signals familiarity and intimacy as opposed to French which is a mark of official and authoritative contexts. Politicians who deliver their speeches in French, often use Corsican to establish their authority to "speak as a Corsican" or on behalf of a Corsican constituency. On the other hand, however, Corsican-French mixing does not only highlight the boundaries between the languages but also blurs them. In many cases, the ability to go back and forth between the two languages seamlessly, Jaffe argues, indexes the shared ability to manipulate two codes.

[iv] Corsica became the region with the highest numbers of representatives *per capita.*

[v] For more on the relationship between the Nationalist movement and Clan politics, see Wanda Dressler's *La Corse En Question(s),* Editions Albiana, 2004; and Jean-Louis Andreani's *Comprendre la Corse,* Editions Gallimard, 2004, and Xavier Crettiez's *La Question Corse,* Complexe, 1999.

Chapter II
The Village, The Clan and the *Non-Dit*

As one of my informants, Jean-Pierre, put it, on Corsica, "You are never sort of not getting along with someone. Either you like them or you don't, period. You are either *bien* [good] with them or *mal* [bad] with them. There is no in between." When I asked him, "So, what do you do if you do not like someone?" He responded, "You do something about it." "You tell them?" I suggested. "Yes, or violence," he replied, straight-faced. "Really?" I asked. "Even today?" "*Bah, oui*..." he replied. Although I never saw a physical altercation, the honor of men like Jean-Pierre depends on their expression, in their body language and regard, of an absolute confidence in their willingness to fight, and (at least in principle) even die, in the name of that honor. (For parallels see Peristiany 1966, Pitt-Rivers 1966, Campbell 1964, Gilmore 1987)

Traditionally, like the Mediterranean societies described by Campbell (1964), Pitt Rivers (1977), and Peristiany (1966), Corsican society was organized in egalitarian, segmentary networks of kin relations. Villages were divided into two opposing kin-based factions, the partitu (for the dominant group) and contrapartitu (contesting party), and social life was pregnant with conflict and power struggles between the two groups. Balance was achieved (to the extent possible) through continuous cycles of reciprocity, public displays of individual honor, and vendetta violence (Gil 1984).

Today, the importance of supporting "one's own" and displaying fearlessness in one's willingness to verbally affront another and, if necessary, physically challenge another, in the name of defending one's one honor or the honor of family or friends,

remains central in Corsican social life (Andreani 2004, Briquet 1997). Where traditionally supporting "one's own" meant a kin-based collective; over the course of the 20th century, this collective loosened and expanded to be, what Orsoni describes as, a "quasi-hereditory" group (1990, 193). Briquet argues that today the "family," although still a foundational feature of social organization, is now vaguely defined. In general, people's knowledge of their blood relations goes out to the third degree (the second cousin). Extended family beyond that is often confounded and grouped together under the term *parents éloignes* (distant relatives)*;* and only the very oldest in the village know the precise bloodlines (Briquet, 45). One's network of family and family friends, referred to as one's *réseau* (network)*,* is still centered around the extended family village community but also includes one's networks of friends and alliances, all of whom are generally aligned in clan affiliation.

In so far as my little family eventually established a "réseau," it was that of our landlord and his wife, who were, in a sense, our hosts. The familial foundation of this network lay in the nine decedents of one couple who had established residence in San Petrone in the late 1800s. Only three of these nine siblings are still living. Two of them live year round in San Petrone, and the oldest turned 100 while we lived there. In our final days on the island, my landlord and his wife helped me make a genealogical tree. While I knew many of the blood relations, my landlord's wife was constantly shocked (and a bit disappointed) when I had trouble remembering a cousin or great aunt who had visited from the continent some months before. However, once we had mapped the genealogy of the nine siblings, almost everyone I knew well in the village was covered.

Unlike Durkheim's vision of "mechanical" solidarity, where individuals of a corporate kin-based collective are bound together by the stability of their sameness,[vi] on Corsica, the family and friend network is *not* stable and secure. One's réseau is arguably as precarious as one's relationship with opposing groups, and perhaps trickier to manage.

In this chapter, I will begin by considering the way in which values of individual and collective honor determine social interaction in everyday situations and render the social world inherently risky for its participants. I will then consider how these values map onto the enduring forces of social organization on the island: patronage politics and the "clan".

Honor and the Village

Pitt-Rivers classically defined "honor" as the "value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society…his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride but also the acknowledgement of that claim…"(1977, 24). On Corsica, the "value" of an individual is tied to the extent of his social network and his ability to mobilize that network on his own behalf or the behalf of another, which depends on how much others feel beholden to him.

Public displays of friendship, loyalty, respect and gift giving actively enforce one's relative place and stability in his réseau. The pressure of what are called locally the "*don*" and the "*contre-don*" (gift and counter gift) are central to maintaining ordinary social ties (Andreani 2004, 32). The most banal, but perhaps most indicative, kind of "gift" that is given and withheld is *recognition*—eye contact, an appropriate greeting, giving another one's ear, attending to what another has to say, recognizing a speaker by responding, laughing, etc**.** The village square, called *la place,* is frequently the stage on

which these social dynamics and village power hierarchies are enacted, observed, and made realities.[vii]

La Place: the Center of the World

Every village has a central square or area for village socialization. Such squares often have a fountain that pulls water from a nearby mountain source, where traditionally people got their drinking water. In San Petrone, la place is the 80 foot by 80 foot space between the village bar, Bar á Serena, and the 800-year-old church. As in most Corsican villages, this is where people pass idle hours--men play boules and settle on the wall in small groups to talk, women sit in their own groups or walk the road to the next village. This space is not, however, as it seems at first blush or in a still photograph of Mediterranean life, a peaceful, convivial space for leisure and relaxation. This does not mean that the village square is not convivial, it can be wonderfully warm and inviting, but it is not simply so. My intimate education in what it means to live in Corsican society happened there.

People's entrance into la place from their nook of the village, usually around 2pm, during siesta, and again after dinner, weather permitting, is followed by a surveying of those who are already present and a round of appropriate greetings. Bisous, the customary kiss on both cheeks, pass between family members who don't live together (if they live together this formality is unnecessary); bisous are exchanged between close friends if a woman is one or both parties and between men if they are very close friends; and handshakes among male friends. Children are encouraged to give bisous but play freely until called upon by their parents to greet, and then they oblige. While not everyone is related by blood, there are dominant family lines. In San Petrone, there are

four major families, which if you traced them far enough back, are in some cases linked by marriage. For example, our landlord and his wife are second cousins.

As I was told early on by a young Corsican singer, "If you don't greet your friends, you may become *mal* with them." And it was true. I quickly learned that a wave or a nod would not do. Even if I was not being acknowledged by a circle of people, whatever their age or hierarchy, it was necessary for me to go from person to person and make physical contact with them, either with a handshake or a bisous, no matter how much it seemed like they'd rather not see me.

What is important is not only the appropriateness of the greetings one gives and receives but also who is watching the interaction. People might be quite friendly if meeting outside the view of others, in the winding back paths of the village, but far less cordial on the streets of Corte or the village square when others are watching.

I was always intrigued by my visits to the doctor's office, which, with a two year-old son in daycare, were frequent. There are four doctors in Corte, who serve the town and all of the surrounding ten cantons (a population of approximately 31,000 people) (Insee 2008). There are no appointments. You get to the doctor's office early in the morning (around 8am) and hope there aren't too many others in the waiting room already. It is possible to wait all morning, until the lunch break at noon, and still not be seen. During the flu season, the waiting rooms are overflowing. It is a rare example in which people from different villages, different networks, are thrown together out of necessity, in a seemingly "neutral" environment. What I observed was that people were quite cordial to each other (and to me), and in conversation they sought out common acquaintances to try to make a link of family or friendship between each other. This

would go on unless someone from a person's personal network showed up, at which point, with an audience present, walls of silence would rise.[viii]

People are constantly both trying to give gifts and to politely decline them, in order to maintain their position in the "in group." Corsica is what scholars have described as a "seesaw" society (Campbell 1964, DuBoulay 1976). There is a sense in which individual "honor" is understood to be a limited resource, and the striving for honor a zero-sum game. If an individual is gaining in honor or prestige, another is always losing. If one gives a gift, thus incurring obligation from the receiver, the balance of honor and respect shifts in the direction of the giver because the receiver is now "in the owe." One is not dishonored to have accepted a gift, but put in a situation of potential dishonor, until he reciprocates.[ix]

I was frequently told that there is always the danger that, "poof," the social ground can fall out from beneath you, and everyone can turn on you, and this happened a few times in our own village.

For example, a formerly central (honored and a bit feared) member of our village community named compromised his honor when he did not express appropriate gratitude for a gift of land granted to him by Xavier, another powerful community member. Xavier was offended, and the relative honor of these two prestigious men was put to the test. Ultimately, it became clear that Xavier pulled more social weight than Jean-Philippe as Jean-Philippe simply stopped frequenting the central square of the village, engaged with difficulty in customary greetings and social exchanges, and became a virtual outsider. Many people expressed sadness about the rift to me privately, telling me that it had made village relations strained, and they hoped it would pass. Yet everyday when Jean-

Philippe drove from his house through the main square of San Petrone on his way out of the village, *all* people, young and old, would look away or engage in conversation so that they would not have to acknowledge him. In keeping with Campbell's description of traditional Sarakastani culture, on Corsica, a loss of honor of this sort does not lead to direct social ostracism but "withdrawal of full recognition or response"(1964, 273), which is almost worse.

The incident occurred about a year before we arrived in San Petrone, and by the time we left there were signs that the community was beginning to mend itself. Jean-Philippe began occasionally coming to the village square in the evenings, though he never stayed for too long, rarely made eye contact, and always attended with an air of humility.

It is not only larger scale disputes that render the social world precarious for its participants. Every interaction brings with it the possibility of a shift in reputation, a loss or gain of honor. And, as a result, people proceed with caution. The reality of ordinary social life on Corsica is that people are always judging each other (even friends and family), always aware of the minute dynamics determining who is in control of any given social situation, weighing who is in "the owe," and struggling to shift the scales in their own favor, which often means at the expense of others.

The constant struggle to secure reputation and honor, at the expense of others, has been described by many Mediterranean anthropologists. Campbell writes, "the threat of denigration is continuous….The natural nobility of a man is continually threatened"(268). DuBoulay says of Greek society, "the public nature of village life makes it such that the

villagers read the lives of others from the signs and indications much as a hunter tracks an animal by its prints"(1976, 398).

Pinzutu: Outsiders

Social negotiations are understandably harder for *pinzutu* (outsiders), community members with weak networks of family and friends. In San Petrone, the *pinzutu* certainly included us but also non-Corsican spouses that had married into the village (even longtime spouses of 20 years or more). I watched (and commiserated) day after day as these community members uncomfortably approached the small groups in la place trying to assess the appropriateness of their greetings, hanging between the fear of waiting until they were acknowledged (with the real possibility that this would not happen) and the fear of breaking into the group to assert their presence and the uncomfortable and awkward exchanges that might (and often did) ensue as each and every greeting was reluctantly given and examined by all.

Over time, as we slowly became acknowledged by our village members and made friends, the society began to open up, at least sometimes. I would accompany a Corsican friend on a walk down the street in Corte and we would stop and greet all of their friends and family (turning a stroll down the main street into an all-afternoon affair). The friendship and obligation that members of the group felt for each other were extended to me, and thus I received the same greeting, momentarily embraced by an entire group of people who often had previously ignored me. This was a wonderful feeling. But the acceptance was often only temporary. On my own the next day, walking down the same street, I frequently become invisible again.

For a long time I suffered in these dynamics, struggling, trying to figure out what made it so that one day I was accepted and the next ignored, what allowed others to find the consistency and stability that seemed to elude me.[x] However, I eventually realized that it was not just me or the other marginal members of the community that experienced the discomfort, ambiguity, lack of stability and consistency in social interactions. It was in fact the name of the game. Everyone lives with this ambiguity, and, in a certain sense, they thrive on it. As Mauss says about reciprocal relations in his famous discussion of the gift, "One does more than derive benefit from a thing [given]: one has accepted a challenge, and has been able to do so because of being certain to be able to reciprocate, to prove one is not unequal"(2000, 41). The insecurity of the social realm on Corsica makes each introduction, each conversation, each favor called in, a conquest of a sort and an opportunity to manifest one's own worth. Ravis-Giordani characterizes it as "a universe in which indifference is unthinkable…filled with friendship and enmity"(1979, 75).

People's willingness to enter into a conquest to prove their individual worth is curtailed, however, by the fact that in negotiations of personal honor, one is always playing with the fire of collective judgment and the immanent danger of ostracism. When one reaches out to another publicly, he extends his friendship and moral obligation in the name of his entire group, and this is always a risk.

One example in particular revealed these dynamics to me early on in my fieldwork, when we became friends with a young couple and their son who was about Jackson's age. The father Mathieu, was a young Corsican scientist who had previously lived in England and Japan, spoke multiple languages and (justifiably) prided himself on being "worldly." He was always wary of any question I asked that seemed to cast

Corsica in a different light than continental Europe or the United States. If I asked him about whether he got restless living in the village, or about the character of social obligation, or how that character extends to political obligation, he would look at me with a blank stare. Despite this, we all got along well, and our families frequently had dinner or went on day trips together.

One day Mathieu and his son met us for coffee in Corte. Jackson, David and I arrived *en ville* before them and sat down at a café that I had chosen more or less at random (maybe I was drawn to it because of the outdoor seating and chic façade). When Mathieu arrived, I instantly worried because I realized that I had chosen a different café from the one where we'd met him a previous time, where a cousin of his worked. I quickly asked if the café I had chosen was okay, letting him know we'd be happy to move across the street. His expression revealed that he was a bit torn, but in typical fashion, he shrugged and said non-chalantly, "oh, no, no, I don't care." He carefully positioned himself so as not to be in view of the other café and spent much of the time surveying the street traffic nervously.

As we were leaving the café, we walked down the street and ran into Nicolas, another friend we had recently made. He was the son of an influential family who runs a number of the businesses in Corte. He quickly gave us the bisous and played with Jackson for a moment. We then introduced him to Mathieu. Rather than exchanging the greeting that we had extended to Nicolas, which would be the custom if a Corsican had done the introducing, a strange cold distance arose between Mathieu and Nicolas. They eyed each other, almost suspiciously, and nodded hello—no handshake, no bisous. This

was unheard of in an introduction of friends of friends. When I asked Mathieu later if he knew Nicolas, he said that he did not.

As social agents, we were, I discovered, liabilities to Corsicans living on the island. It is very likely that these two men did know each other, given that they live in the same small town (though they are not from the same village). And, from this point of view, the coldness they exhibited was likely a result of our total faux pas, trying to bring together two people whom we should have known to keep apart. We just didn't know enough local information to act appropriately. It is also possible, though not likely, they may not have known each other, in which case the atypical coldness may have also come from the fact that we were simply invalid as "introducers" because our own network could not sustain the joining of two individuals. One Corsican meeting another knows that each comes to the table with a network of relations, which tell a lot, even "everything," about them. Being introduced by a "*proche*" (close family member or friend) gives some assurance that one can incorporate this new person into one's own network, and at the very least, one has the guarantee that if this new person turns out to be "trouble," it will reflect on the introducer's reputation, not his own. We could not provide this assurance. Mathieu could not accept Nicolas; he could not extend his network to Nicolas on the basis of us as the bridge, because in some important sense we didn't count.

Wolf (1966) has characterized the kind of social interaction in which each member of a dyadic relationship acts as a potential connecting link to other people, "instrumental friendship." This he opposes to "emotional" friendship in which each member "satisfies some emotional need in his opposite member" (10). This description

falls short, however, for Corsican social connections. Corsican "friendships" are dyadic and instrumental in so far as individuals are always weighing how new connections affect their social identity and the kinds of favors and obligations that they bring with them. However, this does not mean that they are not emotional. Connecting two people and extending one's réseau to another is a highly emotional affair, filled with expectation, fear, risk, hope, disappointment, etc. And, these emotions are not primarily connected to the material things one might gain or lose by engaging in a relationship, but to the possibility of being recognized, and confirmed as a person of worth. These relations are highly emotional because, in each case, they hold one's sense of personhood in the balance.

During my fieldwork, I did everything I could to count, to become a player in this social game, experiencing its weight when it crushed me, and feeling a kind of total intimacy and completeness in the moments when it confirmed me. But, there were times that I was utterly exhausted by constantly trying to secure my "worth." When it was too much, I would jump into the car and speed down the windy "road" out of San Petrone, which was more like a 10-mile driveway of treacherous curves. I would open the windows, look out on the vast mountains, blare the radio and try to escape it. Fleeing the social pressure, however, did not stop me from honking obligatorily as I passed those we knew, waving, shouting out greetings as I flew from them. It was a ridiculous sight.

One entry I wrote in my journal on a July morning, more than halfway through our stay, expresses how I often felt:

> How can I make transparent what it meant to me that Charles and Stephan both gave me the bisous today without a second thought? How can I explain the way this society opens at times and then slams shut like the shell of a clam, leaving you so alone?

One works daily (and in fact, this is in large part people's daily work) to manifest socially and publicly *who* one is.[xi] This identity, while not separate from one's heritage and village, is not static, but depends on one's ability in any given moment to successfully engage in the challenge of social contest. It is the willingness to put oneself out there, fearlessly, and often abrasively, that determines one's honor.

The Non-Dit

In Corsican villages, houses hang on each other, making the physical space feel like a stream of consciousness, or a person's life, ingeniously cobbled together but without a master plan, ridden with change, contingency and unlikely possibilities.

In earlier times, you could determine people's family relations by where they lived. "If their walls touched, they shared blood," our landlord told us. There are many parts of our village in which this is still true. Houses wind inward and upward like the coil on a snail's shell. They can be five stories tall if built on the exterior ring, compensating for the mountain's incline, and only two stories, sitting short and stout in the compact interior of the coil. Some are stucco, some still with traditional dry stone (*pierre séche*) facades, all with shutters that open in the morning and close at night. There are cellar doors, made of random brick-a-brack-wood planks, old bed frames, chicken wire. These run along the bottom of the houses, serving as entrances to the *caves* (cellars) where people store things. Arches, little tunnels, and impromptu stone staircases connect one area to the next. What at first glance seems like a string of forty cramped houses crumbling into each other, reveals itself over time to be a whole universe of passages and networks that allow people to move from one part of the village to another,

without ever touching the main road. And it is a universe the people of the village know intimately, the way one knows a childhood home. They have, over the course of their lives, explored all the nooks and crannies, helped make new ones, watched old ones shift and change.

Through my engagement in the micro-social reality of San Petrone, I came to know this village in a way that I don't know any other social reality, not even my own at home. I know where each person lives, what their car looks like (many know the license plate numbers of all their friends), where they park, what they eat and shop for, what their daily habits and dispositions are. I know whose children are in jail, who is divorced, whose child can't read, who recently experienced death in the family. I know who gets on with whom and why. I lived through and discussed what minute changes took place in the village itself—which house got a new roof, which bathroom was redone, which inner-village path was repaved—and what people think about all these things. I know which people are suspected to have illegal money sources and mafia connections, and I know who is thought to be a line to political power. And I don't even know the half of it.

If I wanted to take part, to stay afloat socially, I had to know as much as I could at all times, to get as detailed picture as I could at each moment to anticipate and counter the kinds of shifts in obligation, honor, and status that might arise and how they might relate to me. Perhaps most importantly, however, living in this reality of total particularity and local detail, I internalized the pressure to observe these things, to care about them, at my own social peril, a social peril that was constantly translated into concrete terms (economic, political, or in my case, my ability to get interviews, information, and resources for my work).

This kind of information, very particular and valuable information about the status of the social reality of the moment, is referred to locally as the *non-dit,* that which is known but not said. It can be very "juicy" information about extra-marital affairs, illegal activities, violence, etc. In one extreme case, I was told that in a small village just south of us someone decided to write anonymous letters to other village members exposing this kind of information about their fellow villagers. In a discussion I had with one village member, she said, "Yes, well, everyone already knew everything, but now it is public and people have to act on it. It's been a disaster! The village is just not the same. No one trusts *anyone*." The village's social world was rocked severely when the *non-dit* became public through an anonymous agent. The articulations were affronts that people needed to avenge, but without anyone to take responsibility for their articulation, there was no obvious outlet for people to defend their honor. The only way for people to ensure that their honor was intact was to publicly treat *each* person in the village as though he was responsible, so that all bases were covered, which essentially destroyed the community.

But valuable information does not have to be "juicy." Knowing who had whom over for dinner, who attended whose funeral, etc. is no less important in order to understand the context in which people's social identities have meaning.[xii]

On the one hand, the *non-dit* goes unsaid because, despite their individual striving to secure their own position within the collective, people are who they are only by virtue of that réseau, and thus feel obliged to protect it. *Omertà* or the "law of silence" continues to be a golden rule on the island. As Galibert has put it, on Corsica it is said, " *'In bocca chjosa ùn c'entre mosche'* (in Corsican: no flies get into a closed mouth). To say too much is harmful, one must not say what one knows, betray secrets; but also: one should

not ask. According to this saying, it is the risk of death which is linked to speech..."(Galibert, 2004, 7).

However, the non-dit refers equally to that which is "not sayable". In my interviews, it was particularly difficult to get people to reflect on the insecurity, volatility, and constant pressure of social life on the island. The kind of information I wanted interviewees to give me as "examples" of social pressures and obligations were always, by their very nature, utterly particular (a particular person did this or that), and inherently costly. The interviewees could not give me this information without also exposing themselves or others. As much as I didn't count, I *was* a temporary member of Corsican society, and the interview exchange did not, *could not*, lie above or outside these dynamics. To tell me would mean to divulge information that made the interviewees vulnerable. And, to give in to my "pressure," so to speak, would be to undermine their loyalty to their network and therefore their own honor.

When I asked a young professor at the university, one who had moved back to Corsica five years before, if it was difficult to get used to the pressures of the don and the contre-don, the réseau, he told me, "Yes, yes, of course it is difficult. I mean, when people arrive, even if they've been warned, '*attention,* on Corsica you must be careful'…you can't really understand until you confront it, how it works…"

"Can you give me an example?" I asked. "I'm outside the system, but even *I* feel the pressure." I laughed, trying to lighten things. He hesitated awkwardly, clearly resisting my request. So I tried to help him, "Well, is it something like you confront how 'it works' when you try to do something, and you can't because you don't have the good réseau?" He laughed a bit and said, "Well, yes, *everything* is like that; it's hard to find an

example, it's difficult. It's difficult; I could come up with certain cases, but we find ourselves back in the same situation. I cannot cite this or that person, even this or that case…because I cannot *identify*…" He paused and diplomatically deferred my request by giving me an abstract example, "You know what it is? When Corsicans do something, they reflect to the third degree…No one just talks. Every time someone says something to someone else, consciously or not, people are thinking, 'he thinks that I think that he thinks…'"

In this sense, the non-dit is not sayable because it cannot be articulated in some realm apart, as a kind of objective description from above. It seems to fall into the category of what J.L. Austin famously called a "performative utterance" (1976). A performative utterance is one which is *not* primarily a description or report of something. And it is not true or false. Rather it is, or is part of, the doing of an action. One of Austin's famous examples is a marriage proposal in which asking another to marry is an action rather than a description. On the one hand, the information that makes up the realm of the non-dit looks descriptive in so far as it tells who did what to whom. But, in fact, it cannot be separated from its performative quality. As Tafani describes it, "if speech is a challenge, then it [speech] can be neither in vain, banal, or casual gossip. Man *is* what his speech brings. Confidence in his speech is what designates a man of honor in the eyes of all"(1986, 47).[xiii]

It is revealing, however, that there is a word (the *non-dit*) for this elusive universe of particular information and social relations. It suggests that people *are* aware of the complex network of unspoken and volatile dynamics as some kind of coherent whole that lies beneath the surface. This results in a powerful sense of secretiveness in Corsican

social life, and an air of complicity, which is palpable in virtually all ordinary interactions on the island.

Politics and Patronage

The descriptions up until this point evoke what has been called the "horizontal" plane of Corsican social structure (Gil 1984), the ordinary way in which family-friend networks and conceptions of honor, obligation and reciprocity determine people's social interactions, their comportment, their daily activities, as well as their understandings of themselves as individuals. We now must consider the "vertical" plane of Corsican social structure, the way in which political power is distributed and wielded on the island.

Corsica is one of France's 22 regions, though in 1982 it became a region with a special status, as France's first "Collectivité Territoriale*."* The Collectivité Territoriale*,* the CTC, based in Ajaccio, is a body administered by an assembly of 51 members, elected for 6 years under universal, direct suffrage. The assembly is responsible for establishing the budget and long term island planning (15-20 years), which is outlined in the *Plan de Développement* and complimented by a *Contrat de Plan État-Région*, which is a state-region contract determining the appropriate investment funds. In France's continuing efforts to decentralize, the CTC has been granted control over the region's cultural policy in the last decade. There is also a regional Prefect (not a Corsican) appointed by France's minister of the interior, who is the local representative of the national government, responsible for exercising the powers that are constitutionally assigned to the national government.

While the official political structure on Corsica, like those in all French regions, is based on principles of representative democracy, there is a deeply embedded "unofficial"

patronage system that actually dominates political action on the island. Patronage has been defined as the reciprocal exchange of services between individuals of unequal social statuses in which the patron provides materials (widely conceived) in exchange for electoral support by the client (Pitt-Rivers 1954, Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984, Briquet 1997). In this section, I will outline the way in which the patronage system functions on Corsica, connecting ordinary people vertically to the state apparatus.

It is important to note, however, that while useful for the purposes of explanation, the distinction between horizontal and vertical social structures on Corsica is really an artificial one. The Clan is the officially "unofficial" structure that connects people to the state, but its functionings do not occur in a realm different from the kind of social negotiation just described at the level of the village. Also, people's sense of political action is not markedly different from their sense of ordinary social action.[xiv] As Briquet says,

> For individuals within the [clan] system, they don't see voting as the consequence of having obtained something (a direct exchange). Rather, the materiality of the exchange is presented as the secondary consequence, the normal outcome of a social tie based on interconnaisance…under the cultural code of mutual aid, under the social necessity of giving, receiving and reciprocating. Reciprocity presents itself as a moral obligation that comes naturally in the terms of friendship, fidelity and reconnaissance. (1997, 23)

However, it would also not be accurate to suggest that electoral politics are *no* different from the ordinary negotiating of social identity. In the village setting, people's reputations are constantly being made and unmade, and the hierarchy of honor is always subject to change. The clan structure is more stable, with family dynasties that have acted as the political link to the French state for generations. Where people are typically unwilling to reflect publicly on village dynamics and the *non-dit*, Corsicans frequently

express public ambivalence about the role of the clan in Corsican society, though this doesn't generally deter them from participating in its political process. The overlaps and interconnections between people's sense of moral obligation to their family/friend networks and their political obligations to the Clan, between the private and the public spheres, between minute village politics and island-wide clan politics, make defining the clan structurally very difficult. As a mayor of a rural village put it, what the Clan *is* is not simply definable, it is *flou* (hazy, like twilight).

Le Clan

Political patronage on Corsica dates to the 19th century when the traditionally opposed kin-based village segments, which had always been violent and competitive became electorally based, though without necessarily developing political ideologies. This enduring form of political organization is called *le clan*.

Today, two dominant "clan" families, usually one from the south and one from the north, control the core political parties on the island and act as the liaison between the French state apparatus and local social organization. The clan is organized in a pyramid structure. The inhabitants of each village are clients of one of the two village patrons (the "*chef*" of the partitu and that of the contrapatitu). These *chefs* are themselves clients of the *capipartitu* who exercise power over the canton, who in turn are clients of the two large families, that are in direct contact with the state and national parties. (Lenclud 1988, Dressler 2004). In exchange for votes, clients are rendered services, often on an individual basis, which account in large part for people's access to employment, state funding, pensions, building permits, etc. (Tafani 1986, Orsoni 1997, Andreani 2004). There are a lot of jobs to distribute. Recall that thirty percent of the Corsican population

is employed by the French state in coveted *fonctionnaire* (civil servant) positions, which are one of the clans' most valuable assets.

Today, the Giacobbi clan, headed by François Giacobbi, is based in the north and the Rocca Serra clan, headed by Jean-Paul Rocca Serra, in the south. Though the clans align themselves with political parties of the French State (Giacobbi is *Radical Gauche* (Radical Left) and Rocca Serra is *RPR, Rassemblement pour la République* (The Rally for the Republic), their own political agendas, bear little resemblance to the party platforms. Clan leaders can change their "official" political affiliation, and bring their entire "clientel" with them. Rocca-Serra started out his career on the Left but later became a leading Gaullist, and Giacobbi, is a Radical of the Left, but his politics are often conservative (Andreani 2004). In a revealing interview Briquet held with the Conseil Général of northern Corsica, the former was told:

> Ideas about le *droit et la gauche* [the 'right' and the 'left'] they perhaps have importance on the continent, but here, its not that which is essential, far from it. That which is essential, it is *les hommes* [the men], the rapports that they have with each other, the rapports that they have with your family…Here, politics, it is a man to man affair much more than ideology. (1997, 18)

Many people I spoke with expressed that, in the words of one informant, "Here, is not like on the continent. Here we vote for men not ideas."

It is generally understood that the work of an elected official is to distribute the resources made available to him according to a logic of "*individualization*" and the "*règles particularistes*" (particular rules) of reciprocity more than in relation to universal or abstract criteria.

Thus, in every Corsican village (even San Petrone) local family networks align with one of the two clans, and local elected officials act on behalf of the clan, bestowing

its favors. The opposing clan factions of each village are not estranged, and they do interact with each other, but at a distance. The rift between the two clans depends very much on particular village dynamics. San Petrone was known for more or less amiable inter-clan relations, though the divide still existed. Members of the same clan are united daily through ordinary social practices—frequenting the same bar, playing boules together, taking an aperitif together, etc. In the first village where we lived, there were two bars, attended by members of opposing clan affiliations. It was possible to go to the café of the opposing clan faction without being accosted, but such an action was generally avoided.[xv]

Voting Practices

In the winter that we arrived on Corsica, municipal elections were being held. I was told by a number of interviewees (primarily non-Corsicans who denounced the practice) that these local elections do not use secret ballots, though they claim to. I was told that one arrives at the village mayor's office to vote, shows his or her identification card to those manning the election table, then writes his vote on a the piece of paper provided, shows it to the election officials sitting at the table, folds it and casts it in the box on the table. People are thus tallied as supporters or non-supporters of the clan in power, and favors can be distributed accordingly.

In an interview conducted by Briquet in his research on clientalism on Corsica, one informant described the process in this way:

> Suppose that A launches a campaign with X. What does he do? A goes to the café of his principle supporter, B. B and his friends have warned supporters of X that their candidate will be there. There are 10, 20 or 30 people present. There are greetings, people have a drink, a pastis; and then A explains to them, he tells them, what he can do for the canton, what he has the intention to do. Sometimes, they don't even talk about politics, they talk about everything, like having a

> normal *apperatif* with friends…And then, there are those have a particular service to ask for. They pass into the back room. No one sees them, no one hears them. Everyone knows that it's for a service, but it is not done publically... And, the adversary, X, does the same thing but at café C…The candidate also does this with the mayor (or the people in power of the opposition if he is of the opposing clan)…to count the votes, to know how many votes by proxy he will have, to know to whom he will render services. But everything happens in a whisper, from mouth to ear"(1997, 35)

In an interview Nathalie, a Corsican woman in her late 40s, told me that after spending her young adult life on the continent, she made the decision to return to Corsica. She is a sculptor by trade and studied history in college. She was looking for work in museum restoration. When she got settled, there was little work available, and she had no luck. When it came time for the mayoral election, her mother told her how it would go: she would vote for the clan, and request a position. Nathalie told me that she was angered by the suggestion because she disapproved of the candidate, who she said was a "fool." But by election day, she still hadn't found work, and her mother continued to push her, so she went down to the mayor's office and cast her ballot as expected. Soon after she was employed.

During the course of the municipal elections that winter one nationalist group, the FLNC-UC (FLNC Union de Combattants), officially "advised" Continental French people living on the island not to vote. An article in the local newspaper read, "In a letter sent to France 3 Corse [the local television station] FLNC-UC has made a menacing declaration." The article quoted the letter, which stated, "We advise *les français,* in the vital interest of our land, not to go to the voting urn… We will respond to those who vote with appropriate action…"(Corse Matin Feb 28, 2008).[xvi] Just as I couldn't be a connector between Mathieu and Nicolas because I didn't have enough social knowledge or personal history on the island, it is felt by some (particularly extreme nationalists) that

continental French are not equipped to vote because they don't understand the political (and social) values of the island.

Ambivalence

Locals are aware that the clan, nepotism, and patronage politics are looked down upon and considered "backwards" on the continent and the West. Moreover, Corsicans themselves have an ambivalent relationship to these forms of political and social organization.

Generally, the ambivalence is framed by two dominant views, which characterize both the scholarship on the Corsican clan and the political and social attitudes towards it. On the one hand, there is the sense that the clan is a corrupt political form that arose in the 19th century as the French State aligned itself with the local elites, the partitu, in order to guarantee itself some amount of administrative, judiciary, and educational control over the Corsican territory.[xvii] For its part, the *partitu* got access to rare resources that it could hold over the local population.

From this point of view, the *élus* (elected officials) benefit from their monopoly of state power, and have an interest in keeping the local population dependent on them both economically and politically. As Orsoni says, "by shackling the individualism and an entrepreneurial mentality (already strangers to Corsican culture) the clan assured itself of a monopoly as mediator between Corsican society and the metropole, the state, and the political and economic spheres outside the island" (1990,193). The Clan is denounced for colluding with the French in, what is seen as, an efforts to "oppress" the Corsican people by keeping the island a perpetual state of dependence and underdevelopment.

On the other hand, there is the idea that the clan is the political extension of an already existing cultural ethos, as Andreani puts it, "*Clientélisme*, [patron-client relations] which introduced the clan into the political sphere, has always had its equivalent in the private sphere with the practice of the don and the contre-don"(2004, 32). As I was told in one interview, "It is our tradition and there is something noble about *clanisme*: a network of solidarity...everyone *se connaisse* [knows each other], relations are personal and all relations have a humanness to them." From this point of view, as Merler puts it, "The clan still remains an essential form of identification with the most profound and healthy values of Corsicanness: honor, solidarity, justice, faithfulness, the importance of community, brotherhood, etc."(Jaffe 1991, 51). And, as Olivesi argues, for those who see it this way, ultimately, contesting "the clan is to contest its cultural legitimacy and the person contesting it becomes the grave digger of Corsican society"(1983:23). This cultural ethos not only still has a powerful moral and epistemological hold on how Corsicans view the world and themselves, but it is also, as discussed above, inherently non-articulatable, so contesting it in any kind of penetrating way is particularly difficult.

Examples

A number of different discursive registers are invoked in daily life to discuss patronage politics, nepotism (*pistoné)* and the clan, revealing a complex of pride, necessity, embarrassment, defensiveness, and resignation.

Dumé

One of the most common ways in which the clan is discussed publicly is with a combination of pride and comic reflection. I was frequently told openly, with a sly kind of grin, that politics on Corsica are a bit "*particulières*" (special). A typical example of

this was when Dumé, a local shop keeper, launched into a story for my benefit, in front of a group of his friends, who looked on in amusement.

> So, it's 1969 and Armstrong is going to the moon. Everyone is watching television, they can't believe it. An old man points up at the moon in the sky and laughs that an American is going to actually *be* up there. People are overwhelmed with disbelief, glued to their televisions. Everything is set and the spaceship takes off. It arrives without incident. Armstrong gets out of the space shuttle. The whole world is watching him in amazement. He has the American flag in his hand [at this point Dumé is acting it out, walking like he's on the moon, making the sound of breathing through a space suit]. Armstrong is beaming with pride. He lifts the flag above his head and is about to stake it, when he sees something in the distance. It looks like humans. He makes his way over, and sure enough, there before him are a group of 4 Corsicans sitting around a table playing cards, a Corsican flag planted firmly in the ground. He is stunned. 'But, wha…how, I mean how did you get here? he asks bewildered.' They say nothing, one throws down a card. 'But, how is it possible…' Armstrong babbles. Another Corsican looks up at him, nods at the cards, and says, 'shh….we're busy.' Finally, Armstrong can't stand it any more. 'How did you get here before me? Without a spaceship or anything?' he demands. The third Corsican's eyes slowly look up at him, and he answers, '*La piston* '[nepotism].

Dumé and his friends all burst into laughter. I laughed, they laughed, we all laughed. On the one hand, in this story, the American is portrayed as a bumbling and frustrated fool. The Corsicans prevail. And they are tough. Dumé's friends listening in appreciated this portrayal. And there is something true about it. There is power in nepotism, power that can surprise people who "play by the rules," as Armstrong does in the story. On the other hand, the reality is that Armstrong *actually* went to the moon. And, in reality, the Corsicans weren't even in contention. This is reflected in the story. The old Corsican man points up to the moon, in disbelief that anyone could *actually* get up there. This undercuts the story with a kind of insecurity and self-consciousness of the gap between Corsica, where there are strong groups of card players, and America where there is NASA. This is part of what makes the story funny. But what keeps the story

from feeling pitiful (because it does not) is a sense of the shadowy, potential strength of nepotistic power, and its ability to come out on top when one least expects it.

Mathieu

On one occasion, after our family spent the night at Mathieu's parents' apartment in Ajaccio, we all sat eating breakfast and listening to the radio. It sounded almost like presidential address. I asked who it was. "Rocca-Serra" he told me. Mathieu said his name with what seemed to me to be a kind of disdain. "You don't like him?" I asked. Lucia, Mathieu's wife, seemed to nod that she didn't like him. Mathieu was defensive. 'No, I like him, it's just here on Corsica there are big families that get elected over and over, for generations." I nodded noncommittally. He eyed me and casually said, "It's just the way it is here. It's different from the US, because…imagine if you live in a village. Everyone knows everyone. There are families that are the leaders in the village. And imagine you are friends with the guy running for mayor. You hunt with him, have coffee with him, but he doesn't have the same political views that you do. And then, it's time to vote…" He paused, and looked at me as if to say, what are you to do? "You vote for him," he answered himself. "It's not like I think it's a bad thing," he said. Lucia pitched in contradicting him, "I hate it..these dynasties…I think it's terrible." He responded, "I don't. It makes things easier. You know who to vote for…"

As Briquet has written, "That the members of the same family group have the same partisan attachments…is imposed by a kind of tacit obligation, adopted sometimes without enthusiasm, because it would be useless and costly to transgress"(1997, 46).

In many different contexts, I was told about the problem of "*proximité*" (proximity) on Corsica. It is suggested that when everyone knows one another, and lives

close together, it is impossible to simply act according to one's own principles or will, because one risks insulting or alienating others and causing huge social rifts.

Pascal

Pascal lives on the outskirts of her village on family land, is constantly worried about money, and admits to being a bit "apart" from the community. She was born in a neighboring village and then grew up in her current village with her dad's side of the family. She went to school and church in the village, and made all her friends there. When she was 19, she married her next-door neighbor from childhood in the village church with 700 guests. But now, and she didn't tell me for how long or why, she prefers to live on the edge of the village. Though she feels attached to her community, she also feels the pressure, the closeness, and it's hard for her. She doesn't like everyone in her business, so she stays to the side. When I asked if it was hard to extract herself, she said, "At first. People don't get it, they make up reasons why, but eventually, its okay."

We took a long walk around her village, had a slightly strained coffee with one of her friends, and then went back to her house where I felt a rare sense of openness, and I asked her about the clan, patronage, nepotism, and the mafia.

"The problem starts with the *élus* [elected officials] who want to have power over everything." She talked in ways I had heard before, particularly in nationalist meetings, about how the élus reach as far as they can, into the houses and families promising favors, jobs, etc. in exchange for votes. "Here," she said, "politics is everywhere, in the air, you breathe it." I asked whether that put pressure on her, "Pressure, yes." She said. "Me, my husband and me, we opted out of the system. I vote for who I want, in principle. But, no doors open for me. I have a hard time finding a job."

"Does it affect your relations in the village?" I asked. "Yes…well, I'm from here, so it's okay, but no one helps open doors. They always find an excuse, a pretext, but that's just the way it is. They accept it, that we're outside the system, but we suffer for it. It's very difficult to do this in a small community. We have to be strong. And I am, but it's not easy. There's nowhere to go."

Pascal's feeling that there's "no where to go," resonates with Mathieu's sentiment that people are too close to express what they "really think." There is the sense that there is no room outside the system, that it extends to the limits of the meaningful universe.

There is an awareness that the clan system is anti-democratic, and from that point of view, oppressive to ideals of liberal democracy and individual freedom which many people uphold as their own. People feel oppressed by this, as well as ashamed. They also, however, deeply value the connections that define their social identities. For most, to undermine these relations is unthinkable, insofar as it would amount to undermining themselves.[xviii]

Conclusion

In a revealing interview Briquet held with a mayor of a rural village, the mayor said,

> 'It is necessary to say that there is no word for "clan" in Corsican. The closest there is is "*parti*" but this is not really the same thing…its more local, at the level of the village…For me, the parti, it is the family, whereas the clan, that's more vast…But, that doesn't mean that the clan doesn't exist…It is something complicated. But, it is a *reality,* I can feel it, I have lived it and I still live it. But, the contours are hazy…And if you write a book about all this, you should always hesitate and say to yourself, "that which I shut in my words, I give a rigidity that is not in life." Because the clan, it is reality ***floue*** **[**tricky, twilight, blurry] and it is difficult, even for those who know it well, to seize this fuzziness.' (1997, 43)

As this mayor suggests, attempts to explain today's Corsican socio-political structure, honor and reciprocity, the *non-dit*, the clan, to lay it bare, is in some serious way futile, or at least bound to be a misrepresentation. One can sketch the outline of the structures that determine social dynamics, individual prowess, political power; but ultimately if one comes away with a structural understanding, one has missed *the* essential feature of this system: that living with it is to experience the weight of its inherent undeterminedness. On the other hand, neither would it be sufficient (even if it was possible, which it is not) to sketch the sum total of all of the relationships of reciprocity, all of the micro don and contre-dons going on, in a given moment. A snap shot of this sort, revealing the almost endless layers of dynamics involved, while in some ways more nuanced than a structural outline, would also fail to portray the inherent instability in all relations, which is in fact the engine that gives them life. While the Corsicans who have "lived it," do understand it, they seem to suggest that the "it" is not available analytically, neutrally. If you want to understand it, there is a cost. You have to put yourself in a position in which you *feel* the suspicion, risk, obligation, and pressure; and this can only happen if you commit. You have to play.

[vi] In a mechanical society, the group is a "a system of homogenous segments similar to one another" people are bound by everyone behaving similarly, believing similarly, engagning in similar work, etc. (1997, 131).

[vii] A study of village square dynamics of a similar sort can be found in Del Negro's account of the *passeggiata* in an Italian town, in *The Passeggiata and Popular Culture in an Italian Town* (2004).

[viii] On one occasion, I saw a traditional singer who I'd seen sing at family community picnics on a number of occassions waiting alone outside the doctor's office. I'd never felt comfortable approaching him before because I'd had no one to introduce me, and he always ignored me. I took the opportunity to talk to him, and with no one he knew around, we talked for almost an hour about singing, the musical tradition, etc. I was overjoyed. He did not, however, "recognize" me the next time I attended an event where he was singing.

[ix] For parallels about the importance of gift giving and reciprocity in Mediterranean honor see DuBoulay (1976), Pitt-Rivers (1966).

[x] The particular difficulty experienced by outsiders pinzutu trying to break into Corsican society has been sometimes taken as a sign of Corsican ethnocentrism, xenophobia or racism (Orsoni 1990).

[xi] This is a markedly different take on how much time people spend in cafés and socializing in Corsican society than Banfield's description of similar practices in a Southern Italian village (1958). Banfield infamously characterized the lack of work as lazy. On Corsica, the endless social visits, rather than relaxing leisure time, are central to people's economic, political and social security.

[xii] Discussion of the role of this kind of information has frequently been studied by anthropologists of the Mediterranean under the term "gossip" (see Zinovieff 1991, DuBoulay 1976, Herzfeld 1985).

[xiii] An extreme example of this is the kind of census fraud that Tafani describes frequently occurring on Corsica, in which the populations of villages are significantly exaggerated as a strategy for the village or canton to increase the number of administrators and state funding allotted to it. This kind of detailed, particular information about the village cannot be neutral. It is, as Tafani puts it, "*une affaire politique, pas statistique*" (a political not statistical affair) (1986, 15).

[xiv] This kind of haziness comes across in everyday talk. On the one hand the "clan" is a kin-term that has been applied to the major political parties, which are often described as a kind of extended family. And on the other hand village social dynamics like those described above in the village place are referred to as "*pulittica*" in Corsican. When people say, as they frequently do, that Corsican life is highly political, there is no distinction made between the horizontal and the vertical.

[xv] I came to realize that the clientele of the majority of businesses in Corte (cafés, boulangeries, restaurants, tabacs) were clan affiliates. Where people shop, eat, where they go to find a travel agent or car mechanic, are ways of affirming their réseau and supporting it economically. I often stopped in town to get a cup of coffee in the morning after dropping Jackson off at the crèche. At first, I had favorite cafés based mostly on their location and how relatively intimidating they felt. And at the beginning, people ignored me, thinking I was a tourist just passing through. As I showed up repeatedly though, they began to eye me suspiciously. I explored multiple spots, and eventually happened upon a number of people I knew from our village in two particular cafés. These were the establishments where I was most welcome, and I began to go to them. From then on, on entering the café, I would go from person to person shaking hands and giving the bisous before I sat down, and I was frequently given coffees on the house.

[xvi] This is ironic given the Nationalist agenda to overturn the clan structure on the island. The tension between upholding Corsican's traditions on the one hand, and contesting the clan structure (one of Corsica's most enduring traditions) on the other, is revealed often in nationalist positions.

[xvii] For parallels seen in rural Italy, see Blok 1974, Holmes 1989.

[xviii] This is connected to Campbell's discussion of the inherently cyclical nature to honor. Campbell suggests that a man who does not defend his worth has not acted honorably, and thus is *not* honorable (1958, 273-74). As we have seen, on Corsica, when one does not recognize another (make eye contact, shake hands, etc.) he has basically said, "I do not see you, you are of no consequence, no worth." If the unrecognized person believes that this other *should* have recognized him, he must confront him and demand recognition. If he does not, he has, in a sense, confirmed that he is of no consequence, by being of no consequence.

Chapter III
The Riacquistu

The weight of the social world on Corsica was a profound adjustment for me. Over time, life in San Petrone did get easier. My skin got tougher. I learned how to demand entry to a social circle without regret as well as how to snub effectively. We, as a family, learned how to give gifts to incur obligation and respect as well as how to quickly return them in order to stay afloat socially. These strategic approaches to social existence gave way to a wonderful intimacy, when things went well (which they certainly didn't always). I also, however, continued to be overwhelmed by the "deadly" seriousness of ordinary social worlds, the way in which the back alleys of the village felt as though they were expanding with hospitality at one moment and closing in on me the next.

In stark contrast to this social ethos, which felt risky, inherently opaque, and infinitely complicated, I was confronted soon after we arrived with a very public and consistent discourse about Corsican identity and tradition. People I talked to were quick to provide me with matching descriptions of Pascal Paoli's reign of the island (complete with an explanation of its being the first constitutional democracy in the West, predating both the American and French revolutions), descriptions of the coveted Corsican blood sausage the *figatellu*, and stories about the village of days of yore when villages burst with life, families had a dozen children, the mountainsides were covered with wheat crops, women washed their clothes in the river with ashes and lavender, alternated baking days at the communal fires, and enjoyed traditional delicacies like beignets, brocciu, the figatellu and chestnut polenta. Echoing this discourse, the headlines in the daily

newspaper and the programs on the local radio station were dominated by similar descriptions of la tradition and le patrimoine.

A whole cross-section of Corsicans—from the rugged shepherd who lived on the outskirts of San Petrone, still making cheese in the traditional way, to the academic teaching Corsican at the university, to the firefighter and his girlfriend in the next village over, to the adolescent girls sitting on the step of the ancient church in San Petrone listening to American music over their cell phones—all seemed prepped to give remarkably unified "ethnographic" descriptions of Corsican culture.

On the one hand, the prevalence of this kind of anthropological knowledge in ordinary life was like a gift for me. I took notes, lots of them. I clipped the dozens of articles produced daily in the local newspaper about the patrimoine. I listened to the local radio, pulling over on the side of the road to jot down what a cheese maker, knife craftsman, or language activist was saying about the relation of these activities to Corsican identity and the patrimoine. The questions that I had come to the island asking, about the character of the Corsican identity, culture and tradition, were constantly being answered for me, without my even asking. However, this was so much the case that after a month or so of soaking up the constant discourse, I began to see that the talk itself, more than (or at least just as much as) what they are talking about—the knives, charcuterie, cheese, even the language and the singing—is a central part of what it means to be Corsican today.

In this chapter, I will describe the movement for cultural reacquisition, the riacquistu, its origins, its discourse, its cultural production, and its relationship to the Nationalist movement. On the one hand, the discourse bears witness to the remarkable

efficacy of riacquistu activism over the past 35 years. On the other hand, the discourse has become so prevalent and standardized that it can often feel flat. As the young professor of the Corsican class I took joked, "whenever a program on how to make the *brocciu* [the traditional Corsican cheese] comes on, my brother texts me…cheese *again*!" And I began to feel this way, wondering whether anyone *really* cared about the tradition, or the preservation of Corsican identity.

This doubt would linger until something happened, and something always happened. When I accompanied Corsican friends on pilgrimages into the mountains in celebration of village saint days, I was always astounded by the scores of people, some carrying toddlers in their arms, many in their late 60s and 70s, who were willing to make the difficult two hour treks, in the name of the tradition.

Or, in January 2008, the office of the president of the Collectivité Territoriale, located in Ajaccio, was burned by nationalists enraged by the arraignment of Yvan Collona, the nationalist accused of assassinating the island's prefect in 1988, and pictures of rowdy nationalists paired with pictures of the charred remains of the office showed up in the news for days.

Or, the Collectivité Territoriale's proposal to change the laws protecting the *littoral* (coastline) became subject to heated, island-wide debate. The proposed law, the PADDUC (*le Plan d'Aménagement et de Développement Durable de la Corse* (The Plan for Sustainable Development of Corsica)), proposed to make small portions of coastal land in 70 of Corsica's 237 communes buildable, encouraging outside investment in the island economy and tourism. Nationalists toured the island holding conferences to illustrate that the PADDUC would be the first step towards the urbanization of Corsica's

coastline and the demise of Corsican culture and the Corsican People. The island population mobilized, and within two months, 16,000 people had signed a petition demanding the plan be withdrawn, which it eventually was in 2009. Anti-PADDUC spokespeople from across the political spectrum citied arguments about the need to protect the land and preserve Corsican culture (*Rinnovu,* October 31, 2008). There is widespread concern on the island, among Nationalists and non-nationalists alike, that Corsica's coastline will become a prime tourist destination, like the neighboring Cote D'Azur. One informant told me, "today, when tourists go to a beach and stay at a hotel, they could be anywhere, they don't care…if you come to Corsica, you should come to Corsica!" A fisherman from the coastal town Porto-Vecchio was quoted in a news report saying: "Intelligent tourism is about balance, not turning an island's coast into a concrete 'tanning drome.' This is about what kind of society we want to live in. There is a visceral attachment to the land here. We like to say: 'You don't live in Corsica, Corsica lives in you.'"(*Guardian,* Jan 26, 2009*)*

Or, I would attend a concert of *Cantu U Populu Corsu* (The Corsican People Sing), the famed group of the 1970s, which acted as the main *fil* (thread) for the nationalist music, and hundreds of people of all ages would sing along passionately to lyrics calling the Corsican people to action, calling on Corsica's "young sons to fight for liberty" (lyrics from the album *Libertà,* 1976).

In those moments, faced with peoples' passionate dedication to the preservation, transmission and valorization of Corsican culture and identity my doubt about their commitment would disappear. In addition as I made closer friends and contacts, I was invited to events considered to be "in the tradition," that were less generic and

mediatized. I would watch as groups of men returned from a hunt for wild boar that I was told was "*á la tradition*," or engaged in traditional singing, or took part in a "traditional" shearing party. I participated with groups of family and friends in making the polenta and figatellu. To make the traditional Corsican polenta, hot water is added to the chestnut flour in a large vat, and a short wooden staff is used to stir the dough vigorously. When the warm dough is stiff enough, it is placed on a cloth, shaped into a loaf, and kept wrapped until it is time to eat. Then the soft loaf is cut in slices using a thread. The figatellu, cooked on spits over an open fire, is either placed on crusty bread to be eaten as a sandwich or cut into pieces to be eaten along side the polenta and the brocciu. To make the brocciu, a white, ricotta-like cheese, the whey (the goat's "*petit lait"* (little milk)) is heated and the goat's whole milk is added. The mixture is heated again and drained. After skimming, the soft cheese is placed in molds, traditionally made of rushes, and today often made of plastic. The brocciu complements the sweetness of the chestnut flour polenta and the salty figatellu.

During these events, I observed as Corsicans of all ages participated and devoured the delicacies, how even the youngest reacted with ease and fascination at the sight of the dead boar, or how the children hovered on the outside of a singing circle watching as their fathers or uncles or grandfathers bellowed and roared. In contrast to the larger more publicized events, like the artisanal fairs that attract people from across the island, these events are typically family and friend gatherings, occurring in people's homes, or village events held in village community centers or a designated outdoor location, attended by the people from the village and some of the neighboring villages.

During these informal gatherings, I came, one might say, to "believe" in people's passionate attachment to this tradition in a way that the artificiality of the constant discourse about the tradition not only doesn't reveal but actually seems to mask. As we will see in the subsequent chapters, many cultural militants *also* find the riacquistu discourse about Corsican culture painfully artificial, and their struggle to get to the "truth" behind this artificiality determines much of their activism today.

Historical Origins

The riacquistu must be understood in relationship to the cultural, intellectual and political ethos of the 1960s and 70s in Western Europe and the United States, in which activists and intellectuals alike contested the imperial legacy of Western European nations and began to insist on the valorization of the diverse, the multicultural, the heterogeneous.[xix] As Edward Said describes it, there was

> an important ideological shift [that] occurred during the 1970s and 1980s… a radicalism and intellectual insurgency…[defined by a]…striking new lack of faith in what Lyotard calls the great legitimizing narratives of emancipation and enlightenment."(1993, 26)

In specific, for marginalized regions such as Corsica, a newfound suspicion arose in regard to the legitimizing narratives of emancipation and enlightenment that had been fed to them by the French State over the course of 200 years, narratives that cast Western political and cultural forms as reaching the heights of human potential.

As Wolf and Cordell put it, in the late 20th century,

> peripheral European areas [were] fed up with the nation state machinery that denied their cultural, political and economic interests. The so called, "new nationalisms" that emerged were united in their demand that nation-states of Western Europe take into account national and ethnic diversity. Activists began to assert the rights of 'forgotten nations.' (2004, 26)

France is particularly well known for its history of centralizing, bureaucratizing, and homogenizing political and cultural policies. Since the 1800s, France's *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission) promoted an ideal of French citizenship and culture as enlightened, an ideal which it used to justify colonial expansion and promote a homogeneous national self-understanding. France's efforts to centralize politically and culturally were not exclusive to the colonies but affected all French regions.

As Jaffe puts it, by "defining French literature and culture as the Zenith of Western civilization…the dominated were thus taught to believe in the rightness of their subordinated status…French ideology of language and identity combined the promise of opportunity and integration with the threat of cultural inadequacy"(1999, 83). Strict educational policies came to bear in the early decades of the 19th century, under the Minister of the Interior. These policies made public education, with curricular requirements determined by the state, mandatory across the Republic. And French became the exclusive language used in the classroom. I was told repeatedly on Corsica, typically by people in their mid-50s or 60s, that their parents had had their knuckles rapped (either with a ruler or a baguette, depending on the teller) when they spoke the Corsican language in school.

And Corsica was not alone. Brittany, the Basque Country, Occitan, among others, were subject to the strong arm of French cultural policy, what Lafont (1967) famously called, "*le colonialisme intérieur*" (interior colonization) (184). Extreme centralizing policies extended, more or less without critical consideration, until the 20th century. It wasn't until after World War II, in the face of worldwide efforts for the recognition of universal human rights in the United Nations, that a National Fund for Regional

Development was formed in France. In 1956, France was officially divided into 22 regions. And in 1964, it was decided that a federally appointed prefect should oversee and coordinate the action of the regions to ensure federal cohesion and that the state plans fit with regional specificity. These early regionalist efforts were enacted to increase the administrative efficiency of the French state and were *not* particularly concerned with encouraging diverse cultural and linguistic identities in the French provinces. But when Mitterrand was elected in 1981, well into the 5th Republic, for the first time a French president approached regional diversity as strength rather than a weakness.

As Greilsammer suggests, regionalist frustrations in France have traditionally centered around four points:

> (1) Paris totally dominates the provinces, which must turn to the capital for advice in every even minimally important decisions; (2) the administrative divisions (departments, cantons and "*arrondissements"*) do not [always] correspond to…a sociological reality; (3) these districts themselves lack…efficient autonomous institutions; (4) there is no intermediate regional unit between the department and the state. (1975, 85)

The tension between Jacobin ideals of a culturally and linguistically unified Republic and regional diversity remains a significant struggle for France today (see de Montricher 1995, Crozet et al. 2000).

May 1968

Leading up to Mitterrand's election, many regional activist movements arose: in Brittany, in the French Basque Country, in Occitan, and in Corsica. They were largely inspired by the revolt and subsequent liberation of the Algerian colony in 1962, as well as by the anti-establishment student riots of 1968 in Paris.[xx,xxi] As one Corsican cultural militant who participated in the 1968 riots put it to me,

> the anti-colonialist discourse was rampant—we criticized the nation state's practices, its ideology, its pretension to greatness. We were fascinated by the "other" that was being erased by this machine. Then we realized that this was exactly what was happening on Corsica, *chez nous*!

As Dressler-Holohan states, "To be Corsican in the 1960s, was to identify with the colonies of the 3rd world….Corsica seemed to be one of the last colonies of the French empire" (1987).

During this time, Corsican students at the universities in Nice, Aix en Provence, and Paris created activist groups and gathered in heated discussions and "*soirées guitares*"(guitar evenings) also known as *veghja culturale* (cultural gatherings) in Corsican where a new genre of protest music was sung by militant singing groups and, soon after, also by the crowd. Impassioned students discussed the status of Corsican culture, identity, and political freedom. The primary locus of this activity in Paris was the *Union Nationale des Étudiants Corses* (National Union of Corsican Students) founded in 1962. This group produced a journal called *L'Union-Corse-l'Avenir* (Future Corsican Union) that became popular among the student population and expressed the importance of the rediscovery of Corsicans regional identity (Crettiez 1999, 92). At first, these student activists were driven by two primary demands: that the French state open a university on Corsica, and that Corsica be included in the *Loi Deixonne,* a 1951 law which allowed educational instruction in minority languages but which had excluded Corsica because the Corsican language was not seen to be sufficiently united or codified (Jaffe 1999).

The vast majority of Corsicans living on the continent, a population of approximately 400,000 people, have always maintained close ties to the island, returning for yearly visits, resulting in the doubling and tripling of village populations during

summers (Jaffe 1999, 52-53). The burgeoning activism among college students on the continent was harnessed on Corsica during the summer months in the "*Université d'Été*," (Summer University) which began in Corte in 1973, and was organized by Corsican professors (working at Universities on the continent) and their Corsican students, both of whom returned to the island for the summers. Students and locals gathered at the summer "university sessions" organized on the grounds of the walled garrison in Corte, the ancient headquarters of Pascal Paoli, to discuss the future of the Corsican language and economy, the need for a University on the island, and the political path that lay before them.

From the beginning, Corsican student activists divided in their priorities into two general directions represented by the first two regionalist movements, the ARC (*L'Action Régionaliste Corse*) (Corsican Regionalist Action) founded in 1967, and the FRC (*Front Régionaliste Corse*) (Corsican Regionalist Front) founded in 1966. The ARC, which was politically oriented, focused largely on the economic decline of modern day Corsica, which the group argued was a direct result of French neglect. It aimed to "do away with the negative effects of 'French Imperialism' on linguistic, economic and social progress on the island"(Jaffe 1999, 69). The FRC's orientation, on the other hand, was more cultural, focusing on remedying the linguistic and cultural alienation of the Corsican people, and the popular lack of appreciation for Corsican tradition and heritage (Dressler-Holohan 1987).

It is impossible to consider the riacquistu's movement for cultural reappropriation apart from the Nationalist movement, which has been its constant, if problematic, partner. The line between cultural and political activism is slippery on Corsica. While it is

important, as one is reminded *often*, not to confound those activists devoted to the preservation and valorization of the Corsican language, Corsican artisanal and musical tradition, etc. with Nationalists who (often violently) demand political sovereignty (either increased autonomy or total independence from the French State), it is equally important to understand how profoundly they implicate each other, both in membership, ideology and in the public imagination.

The ARC and Corsican Nationalism

L'Action Régionaliste Corse had a political agenda focused on exposing Corsican economic and political disenfranchisement to be a direct result of French "colonization." The founding ARC manifesto, *Autonomia*, reads,

> Over time, France's treatment of Corsica, has slowly and ruthlessly prepared for the aggression seen today…Today's aggression is, in turn, the prelude to tomorrow's execution of the grand colonialist design, meticulously planned and inscribed in the official Plans and Schemas of the French State: the total elimination of the Corsican People (1974, 14).

The ARC sought institutional changes to gain autonomy (not independence), giving more political power to island institutions as opposed to the Prefect and other Central government officials. They called for a "regional assembly, elected by universal suffrage to oversee domestic matters, economic policy and development, tourism, property, pollution and the employment and education of Corsicans"(Savigear 1975, 466). Militants' discontents were widespread. They argued that Corsica was the most deprived part of metropolitan France, that the depopulation of the interior was due to island underdevelopment—namely, the lack of employment opportunities and the lack of education and training on the island. It was suggested that France had "lured Corsica's

best children away to be educated, to fight for and administer France"(Savigear 1990, 88).

These feelings of neglect were galvanized at the end of the Algerian War (1962), which is often pointed to as the tipping point for Corsican nationalist activity on the island. 18,000 *pied noirs* emigrated from Algeria to Corsica at the war's end. [xxii] Corsica's population was already struggling to survive in a crumbling traditional society that had not seen the fruits of an industrial revolution. The traditional agricultural and pastoral modes of production had been unraveling since the turn of the century as people left for wars and work and the population got increasingly older.

When the pied noirs arrived, it had been scarcely ten years since France had turned its attention towards Corsica's chronic underdevelopment. In 1957, a Program of Regional Action had reported that Corsica was demographically weak, that there was a lack of educational and economic opportunities on the island, that agricultural methods were "inefficient," and that transport costs drove the cost of living up significantly (Jaffe 1999, 67). Two priorities for island development were identified: agriculture and tourism. The French government responded by instituting SETCO: *Society pour L'Équipement Touristique de la Corse* (Society for Tourist Infrastructure on Corsica) a program to help the tourist industry and SOMIVAC: *Societé pour la Mise en Valeur d'Agricole de la Corse* (Society for the Valorization of Agriculture), aimed at agricultural development. SOMIVAC's program funds were used to clear the fertile east coast of Aleria, the *plaine orientale*, which had gone undeveloped due to malaria until WWII when US Forces eradicated it. The newly cleared land was divided up into plots to be distributed for agricultural development.

However, with the influx of immigrants from Algeria occurring at the same time, and the pressure on the French state to accommodate them, most of the plots were distributed to the newcomers—who were given SOMIVAC land and subsidies for agricultural development (Savigear 1975, Andreani 2004). This enraged the Corsicans.

"*Les événements d'Aleria*" (the events of Aleria) mark the moment that Corsican activism became a political struggle of national importance. In 1975, founding ARC militant and educated physician, Edmond Simeoni, along with a number of his fellow ARC members, occupied the cellar of a winery on the plaine orientale, owned by a pied noir who had benefited financially from France's development program. The occupation was a protest of government policies that had led to the winery's financial success but not to similar successes for most Corsicans. It was also a protest of the illegal process of "cheptelization" (adding sugar to wine) that the winery was suspected of, and which had gone unchecked by the authorities.

The ARC militants were armed and took hostages. A thousand National Guard troops were flown in from mainland France. Two policemen were killed, and Simeoni surrendered himself and went to jail for five years, becoming a martyr for the cause. The ARC was banned by the French government, and the group dissolved and recreated itself as the UPC (*l'Union du people Corse*) (Union of the Corsican People), whose mission, to this day, has been to work *non-violently* for autonomy and the recognition of the existence of "*le peuple Corse*." This party has been the core of the "autonomists" faction of the Nationalist movement, which has always sought increased political *autonomy* for Corsica, within the context of the French State. This is opposed to the more radical "separatists," represented primarily in the FLNC party (see below) who demand total independence.

In 1976, 12,000 Corsicans marched the streets of Bastia to protest for the freedom of Simeoni and all the ARC members (now UPC) who had been put in jail after the events of Aleria. That year, 38% of Corsicans self identified as "autonomists" (Bithell 2007, 123). The extreme police response to the events of Aleria, and the subsequent public popular support for the autonomist movement, made people's concerns about the state of the Corsican economy, discontents about the island's relationship with the French nation, and a sense that the Corsican culture and people were in peril, national news and the topic of public debate. In a magazine article reporting the events of Aleria, one French reporter suggested that,

> Corsica was hardly an object of autonomist propaganda until the 1960s. It was then that the impatience of the insular people began to manifest in light of the retard with which the government realized its promises to ameliorate the roads, maritime and air-transport communication with Corsica, help to agricultural producers, and to "*mis en valeur*" [valorize] the island. (Le Crapouillot, No.64, 1982, p.77)

From jail, and after he was released, Simeoni rallied the island population around UPC's cause, appealing to young farmers without land, small-scale wine producers who had not benefited from state subsidies, and small hotel and restaurant owners who were worried that the State's tourist development plan would, like SOMIVAC, privilege the non-Corsican population on the island (Crettiez 1999, 37-47). Additionally, and perhaps most significantly, UPC's increasing affiliation with agricultural unions turned what began as student based movement into a populist one (Dresser-Holohan 1987, 322).

The FLNC

In the wake of the events of Aleria, a new group arose, one which has come to dominate the popular perception (both local and continental) of the Corsican Nationalist movement: the FLNC (*Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale di a Corsica* (National Liberation

Front of Corsica)).[xxiii] It marked the split between "autonomist nationalists" and "separatist nationalists." Both groups share the belief in a unique Corsican people and the desire for recognition of Corsica's cultural and linguistic heritage, but the autonomist nationalists, like the UPC, gave up violence, while separatists groups, like the FLNC, resorted to violence frequently. The violence central to the FLNC's strategy was evident from the outset. The FLNC's first "*Nuit Bleu*" (Blue Night) occurred in 1976, and 20 bombs were exploded simultaneously across Corsica, Paris, Nice, and Marseilles. The majority of targets were public buildings and the offices of French administrators. The FLNC's demands have included Frances's recognition of the legitimacy of the "Corsican people," the removal of the French army and police force from the island, the institution of a popular, democratic government that reflects the will and needs of the Corsican people, the Corsican right to auto-determination, which would mean that after a transitional period, Corsicans would have the right to democratically choose their destiny with or without France, and the demand that imprisoned nationalists be treated as political prisoners. (Savigear 1990, Dressler 2004, Casanova 1999).

In addition, the FLNC, and all the nationalist groups, denounce the clan, arguing that it is an arm of the French government, and that its continued existence restricts social, economic, and political growth on the island. As the FLNC put it in a 1996 press conference, their goal was to "shatter the clan structure—in a definitive manner—so that it will stop weighing so negatively on Corsican society"(Crettiez 1992, 62). However, as Andreani, explains, the Nationalist anti-clan stance is sometimes at odds with its dedication to Corsican identity and tradition. "The nationalists want to attack clanism in

the name of Corsican identity. But they haven't understood that clanism is a part of Corsican identity"(2004, 85).

FLNC members became increasingly radical, and violence abounded soon after the group was established. The journal *Le Crapouillot* reported in 1982, "at the beginning, with ARC...militants held hunting rifles and their faces were uncovered...in sum, it was the tradition. With those who have taken over [the FLNC], it's plastic (bombs), *cagoules* (hoods), and tommy-guns." (Le Crapouillot, No.64, 1982, 76). In 1971 there were 9 bombings across the island. In 1973 there were 40 bombings. In 1977, there were 300 bombings (77). Nationalist bombings are still an almost daily feature of life on the island. Typical targets are French businesses and administrative buildings and foreigner's vacations homes. In 2005, there were an estimated 200 bombings over the course of the year on Corsica. In 2006, 190 (*Corse Matin* December 11, 2007*)*. By the end of the 1970s, what had begun as heated political debate among University students in cafés in Paris had become radical political action on the island. Today, the Nationalists of the FLNC are a quasi-terrorist organization, shown in the news wearing facemasks, and holding semi-automatic weapons.

The Disintegration of the Nationalist Movement

Over the past 30 years, the movement for cultural revitalization has increasingly overtaken Nationalist politics and discourse. In a poll taken in 2000 by *L'Institute Louis Harris* and reported by the magazine *Corsica* (January 2000 n.4, Pp. 7-18), when the Corsican population was asked how connected they felt to the nationalist agenda, 62% of people reported feeling "distant" or "very distant"; while 16% felt more or less close, and only 4% answered very close.

In the same survey, however, to the question, "Personally, are you in favor or opposed to the notion of a "Corsican People" (*le peuple corse)* being officially recognized by the French authorities?" 62% answered favorably, 22% opposed, and 16% did not answer. When the favorable responses were examined in relation to profession, 65% of artisans, 60% of middle level professionals, 65% of white collar workers, 75% manual workers, 58% of retired people, and 53% other/inactive, voted in favor of the official recognition of the Corsican People. And when asked, "Personally, are you in favor or opposed to making Corsican language instruction obligatory in island schools?" 62% answered favorably, 33% opposed, and 5% didn't respond. Today the popular dedication to the reacquisition and valorization of Corsican culture, language, and identity crosses class lines, ages, and even political/clan affiliation.

In large part, the shift towards cultural activism is a result of the heightened violence and disintegration of the nationalist movement that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, which is locally referred to as "*la guerre*" (the war), the main Nationalist groups (the FLNC and UPC) splintered into many factional movements, which were riddled with personal conflicts and individual ego-driven agendas, and violence between nationalist groups ramped up. Le Roux writes, "The nature of the violence changed. Bombings aimed at killing people became more frequent, and it began to resemble traditional vendetta violence between opposing social groups, as a means of *règlement de comptes* [regulating of accounts]"(2001).[xxiv] As my neighbor in San Petrone told me, "You know Jean-Philippe, the nationalist leader who lives down there?" He asked pointing down our road. "In '94, one of the leaders of another nationalist group was killed in Bastia. We were warned, lay low. But, Jean-Philippe's brother, Lurenzu, also a

nationalist,...Lurenzu didn't pay attention. The next morning he was driving with his wife and 6-month-old daughter. He was shot and killed." My neighbor looked down. "You know Vannina? The woman who works at the bakery near the train station?" he asked me assuming that because of her link to San Petrone, of course I'd know her. "That's his wife." The assassins came from Corte, and everyone in San Petrone knew them. "It changed my life," my neighbor said sadly, and continued to talk about how virtually every Corsican micro-community had lost *proche* (close family or friends) to the inter-nationalist group struggle.

In addition to the increasing number of communities that were experiencing loss due to inter-group violence; people were becoming disillusioned with the increasing frequency and extremity of anti-French violence. A car was blown up in the pedestrian restaurant area of the port of Bastia in 1990. In 1991, an FLNC member shot his way out of a police ambush. In 1996, in a "Christmas Offensive," the FLNC attacked the military barracks in Figari with machine guns and launched a grenade attack on a police station in Zicavo (Reuters 1996). And, most importantly, when Claude Erignac, the French prefect on the island was assassinated by a Nationalist in 1998, the momentum behind the Nationalist movement faltered.

The "Statut Particulier"

When Mitterrand was elected in 1981, a combination of his progressive policies on regionalization and the heightened Nationalist violence on the island, led to the passage of Corsica's first *Statut Particulier* (1982), establishing Corsica as France's only Collectivité Territoriale (the CTC). The Statute officially recognized Corsica's "specificity." Article 1 stated,

> *L'organisation de la région de Corse tient compte des spécificités de cette région résultant, notamment, de sa géographie et de son histoire.*[xxv]
> (The organization of the Corsican region takes account of the specificities of this region resulting from, notably, its geography and its history)

A second statute in 1991 (*Statut Joxe)* established administrative autonomy and gave the CTC specific institutions, establishing separate deliberative and executive bodies. The assembly became responsible for establishing the budget and long-term island planning (15-20 years), which is outlined in the *Plan de Dévéloppement* and complemented by a *Contrat de Plan État-Région*, a state-region contract determining the appropriation of investment funds. Investment in Corsican objectives is dominated by federal (French) funds, and complimented by regional and EU funds.

In the first election of the Corsican Assembly, in 1982, the UPC, *l'Union du people Corse* (formerly the ARC), acquired a mere 7 seats out of 61 (61 was the original number of seats. It was reduced to its current number, 51, in 1992.) In 1984, the UPC gained only 3 seats. In the electoral process, members of the Nationalist movement were confronted with the depth of the clan system on the island. The newfound political autonomy and economic funding that the statutes of 1982 and 1991 granted to the regional governing body meant a marked increase in the resources that political elites had at their disposal to distribute among their clienteles. The Nationalists couldn't compete with the better-funded and connected clan structure.

Thus, by the end of the 1990s, the increasing disillusion among the island's populace with Nationalist violence, combined with the risk that voting with the party posed to their individual welfare and job prospects (Dressler 2004), seriously hampered Nationalist efforts.

In 1999 and 2000, the French government's socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, organized the *Matignon Process*, in an effort to help stabilize the Corsican political situation. The "Jospin Method," as it became known, was a political approach to the Corsican situation designed to encourage open negotiations and to formally contest the traditional elite/government relationships that had dominated Corsican policy prior to that (Dafarty 2003). The Nationalist party was encouraged by Jospin's efforts. In these negotiations, a two-phase plan was articulated, which became the Matignon Process. Phase one was a transitional experimental phase in which the maximum number of measures, not requiring revision of the French Constitution would be introduced. This included the CTC's increased autonomy over its budget and cultural policy. Phase two was to be enacted in 2002, after the evaluation of the experimental phase. This radical second phase would give the Corsican Assembly unprecedented legislative power, which would require a change in the French Constitution (given the approval of the French President and the parties in power in 2002). The reestablishment of civil peace was a pre-condition for phase two implementation.

However, in January 2002, three months before national elections, the French Constitutional Court voted that the proposal to give the Corsican Assembly rights to pass its own laws were in breach of the principle of national unity (Elias 2009, 132-136). In that April's presidential and parliamentary elections, President Jacques Chirac, who was on the right, was re-elected but Jospin, the socialist Prime Minister, was not. Chirac, subsequently, abandoned other aspects that Corsicans had considered of prime importance in the proposed reforms (including the inclusion of Corsican in primary school curriculum). Finally, when a referendum was held on the island in July 2003 in

regard to phase two, it was only in relation to one of the more controversial aspects of the second phase that Jospin had promised, namely whether the two electoral constituencies on the island (its two departments) should be replaced by a single constituency. This was voted down by the Corsicans (51% to 49%), and is now frequently taken to be a sign that Corsicans voted down the possibility of legislative power. But this is not the case. All of the Corsicans I asked about the Matignon Process said defensively that the terms had been changed after Jospin left office and the proposal had stopped being representative of their needs. The importance of the Matignon Process, as pointed out by Dafarty (2003), is that it marks the closest French decentralization policies have ever come to letting regional interests modify constitutional ones. But it did not succeed.

Now We are Cultural Militants!

Today, people tend to be tight-lipped about the Nationalist movement, quick to describe it as marginal and volatile, and not indicative of the Corsican culture at large. Nationalist discourse is also often considered overblown. Some of the more marked features of extreme Nationalist discourse include assertions that le peuple Corse is a "*communauté de destin*" (destined community). Claims are made about the "inhumanity" of French policies. And the State is accused of trying to repopulate the island with non-Corsicans and "*faire disparaître*" (make disappear) the Corsican people. Nationalist discourse includes fiery calls to action (often violent) in the name of *libertà* (in Corsican: liberty) and condemnations of local elites in office (les élus).

In an informal interview with a leading Nationalist who lives in San Petrone, when I asked him about the riacquistu, he said, "Back in the day when people arrived here on Corsica, they were obligated to learn to speak Corsican, to be able to communicate, to

fit in. They had to live this life, and respect our ways—savoir faire, products, language… Now, people arrive and only hear French, not Corsican so there is no integration." He ranted about the French policies. He cited the subsidies that are given by the French state for raising cows, and became heated insisting that these subsidies are entirely impractical for Corsica, a land of pigs and goats, not cows. "It is charcuterie and cheese, not beef that are our products." When I ask whether he thinks this is just an oversight in French law or intentional, he says, "not just intentional, calculated." He told me that change has to come at level of politics. Corsican has to be made the official language so that it is obligatory for people to work. Laws need to be made by Corsicans themselves so they reflect more accurately their needs.

In January 2008, I attended a Nationalist meeting held in reaction to Yvan Collona's arraignment, in an amphitheater at the University that seated 300 people. A microphone was handed around to people in the audience, members of many different Nationalist groups including—*Corsica Nazione, Corsica Libera, U Rinnovu, Fronte Ribellu, A Chjama, PNC*. The first man talked passionately about the need for an immediate response to the Colonna affair. He talked about the repression of Corsica, the need for the expression of "libertà," and he proposed an immediate reaction that coming Saturday, a manifestation (the manifestation that would lead to the destruction of the President's office). People cheered in response. Another man rose to speak. "This is no longer a question of us being Corsican and them being French...It is a question of us being treated as animals. It is a question of humanitarianism. We are being treated like animals." People cheered. Another man called for the microphone. He talked about how they, as a group, have to be clear regarding violence—whether their politics condemn or

encourage it. He insisted that the younger members need guidance; they need to know what to do. "It seems to me we speak in a double voice—saying two things" (don't be violent/ then encouraging violence). "We need to be clear!" he shouted. His tone and the reaction made it clear that this meant, "we should be violent!" Cheers.

Despite the general sense on Corsica that these positions are extreme and not representative of the Corsican people at large, the general population remains passionate about their belief in the existence of a true Corsican identity, culture, and tradition. In a conversation I had with our landlord's son, Antoine, he expressed a position that I found to be common. He rejects Nationalist politics, considering them, "a strong engine with no driver…" However, he also says, "There is a difference, no, not a difference, a specificity here; it is undeniable. Then the question is, what to do with it. Try to keep it, to hold it, and at the same time keep going..." A young singer I interviewed told me, "Politics didn't work. Now we are cultural militants." Jean Pasquin Castellani writes, "The disenchantment with the political revindication, in a certain measure, was compensated for by the enchantment created by the *mis en scène* (putting on stage) of the culture"(2004, 356).

The FRC and the Riacquistu

From the outset, the counterpart to Simeoni's autonomist nationalists, the FRC, *Front Régionaliste Corse* (Corsican Regionalist Front) founded in 1966 focused on the "revindication" of Corsican culture (Dresser-Holohan, 1987), which it argued had been folklorized and exoticized, to the detriment of Corsicans' understandings of their own identities. Corsica has long been exoticized by European travelers. As Candea puts it,

> Corsica in the 19th century was a familiar topic for French novelists such as Dumas, Maupassant or Mérimée, who inserted into French popular culture the

> description of the island as a place of violence, poverty and passion, lonely isolated villages, women in mourning and bandits—and above all mystery: dark, seething secrets, hidden purposes and stiletto blades flashing in the night. (2010, 42)

Bithell examines more recent exoticizing representations of the island, looking at the Corsican music scene in the 1940s and 50s, which was comprised of a number of singers who became famous on the continent singing nostalgic lullaby-like songs, *chansons,* popular in the disillusioned post WWII ethos in France. The songs painted a romanticized picture of Corsica's abandoned villages and rural interior. These singers performed their concerts in Paris dressed in "traditional" clothing, appealing to people's nostalgic desire for a simpler time that Corsica was thought to embody. The cultural activists of the 1970s argued that these artists, "sold out to an image of Corsitude that had little to do with insular life as lived by 'real' Corsicans…" (Bithell 2007. 103).

In the 1970s, the FRC aimed to "restructure the symbolic field" of Corsican identity (Dressler-Holohan, 315)—an effort that eventually spanned virtually all aspects of cultural production. Rinatu Coti, a young member of the FRC, came up with the name *riacquistu* to describe these efforts, during a session of the Université d'Été," in 1974. The project of these activists, who came to be known as "*militants culturels*," or "*les culturels,"* or "*la generation soixant-dix,*"(the generation of the 1970s) included the production of locally authored historical, ethnographic, and archeological accounts of Corsican culture (which, until that point, were virtually non-existent).[xxvi] It included efforts to energize artistic production that emerged out of the Corsican experience and was written in the Corsican language, including poetry, literature, playwriting, and theatrical performance.

Efforts at cultural reacquisition also included the development of an *économie identitaire* (an economy specific to Corsica's cultural and environmental heritage), which it was hoped would encourage Corsicans to return to the island and apprentice to the oldest generation of artisans, farmers, and shepherds in order to experience, learn about, and document Corsica's natural resources (figs, grapes, clementines, chestnut trees, olive trees, cheese), and traditional modes of production (shepherding and cheese production, basket weaving, woodworking, knife making, etc.) so that these products and processes would become a part of the collective understanding of Corsican identity and, at the same time, mobilize the economy.

One of the riacquistu's most powerful and enduring efforts has been the revival of the traditional repertoire of Corsican song that includes the *paghjella*, the *lamentu*, and *chjam'è respondi*. One group in particular has been responsible for the powerful role of song in the movement for cultural reacquisition, *Canta U Populu Corsu*, (The Corsican People Sing). In the 1970s, members of Canta traveled across the island to find traditional singers, to learn from them, and to recruit members to their group. They gave conferences on the art of the paghjella, and they organized cultural manifestations and musical evenings in the cities and the villages. In the early years, Canta refused to be paid for their performances, considering them to be cultural rallies rather than performances.

The music's popularity spread radically and became the rallying call of a generation. In a retrospective produced about them in *Le Provençal*, 30 years after their inception, Canta's activism was described as follows,

> In the 1970s, a group of young people united in a common combat, partaking in the same dream, to fight against the silence. A flag, a chant, shoulder to shoulder:

> it was the beginning of the 'riacquistu'. The Corsican People Sing: Canta u Populu Corsu. More than a name, it is a declaration of faith. More than a group, it's the memory of all of Corsica that has testified, for now over 30 years, to the soul of this land and to the passionate will to transmit the collective memory of a people and their freedom. (*Le Provençal* November 23, 1993, p.26)

Canta, which continues to exist today, had never had fixed membership, but incorporates new musicians as others leave, often to start their own groups, which they do frequently. As Bithell puts it, by the mid 1990s, everyone "had a cousin who sang in a group" (227). Today there are a few hundred musical groups across the island, of varying levels of professionalism, and in addition, many small *équipes* (teams) in most micro-regions who sing together informally at family and village gatherings. The number of group performances publicized in the daily newspaper today testifies to the fact

> that the group phenomenon is a prominent feature in Corsican society today… some of the groups have been active for twenty-five years or more and continue to…[be] the soundtrack to everyday life…through open windows [one] is serenaded by Canta u Populu Corsu, Alte Voce, A Filetta, Voce di Corsica, and Canta again….(Bithell, xxiii)

Canta has been the model for most of these groups, who continue to consider their own musical activity a form of activism and are influenced by Canta's original repertoire and cultural politics. The musical movement has received more popular attention and inspired more passionate participation in cultural revitalization than any other realm of riacquistu activism. Many musical groups deriving from Canta have enjoyed international success, particularly as World Music began to flourish in the 1980s (*A Filetta, I Muvrini, Jean Paul Poletti, Maì Pesce*) (Bithell 2007). Beginning in the 1980s, *scola di cantu* (singing schools) arose to teach the younger generations forgotten musical

repertoires and traditions, and recording studios flourished capturing the musical explosion.

Associative Action

In addition to music, the riacquistu has largely been promoted through the creation of non-profit associations, typically representing a cluster of villages (a pieve)[xxvii]. These associations continue to dominate the cultural sphere today. There are approximately 20,000 associations, with practically half of the population involved with the activities of an association (Bithell 2007, 114). As one Corsican journalist put it, Corsica's cultural associations are "the millipedes of a Corsica that does not want to die" (Liasandru Bassani in *Journal de la Corse 2-8 July 2004* quoted in Bithell 2007, 137).

A few enduring associations, created in the 1960s and 70s, have been particularly influential. *Corsicada* formed in 1964 and turned into the federation *E Voce di u Cumune* (The Voice of the [Local] People:EVC) in 1978; the *Centre de Promotion Social* formed in 1966 in Corte; *L'Adecec* (*Association pour le developpement des études archégologique, historique, linguistique et naturaliste du Centre-Est de la Corse*) (Association for the development of archeological, historical, linguistic and naturalistic studies of central-east Corsica)), formed in 1970; and the *Tavagna Club* formed in 1967.

L'Adecec has been instrumental in cultural militants' efforts to teach Corsican, codify the orthography, gain official, political recognition for the Corsican language, and to create bilingual schools. The association is still active today, having expanded its activity into general "*action au patrimoine*." In addition to its longstanding efforts to preserve the Corsican language by creating a vocabulary "bank" in which they collect traditional vocabulary in all its variations, specific terminology for modern processes, and

proper names, they also give Corsican language classes, and promote Corsican language use on their radio station. L'Adecec has created an ethnographic museum, which the association describes as a "*veritable lieu de memoire du patrimoine*" (veritable space for the memory of Corsican heritage). It is a four story building literally packed with ordinary objects from times past, which are a testament to traditional Corsican culture—traditional clothing, houses, tools for making wine, blacksmith's set up, etc. L'Adecec runs a radio station, *Voce Nustrale* (Our Voice), which promotes Corsican culture and a large portion of the programming is in Corsican. It holds conferences with topics such as "*Pascal Paoli et l'État corse: mouvement et liberation nationale en Méditerranée*" (Pascal Paoli and the Corsican State: national movement and liberation in the Mediterranean); "*Histoire de la langue Corse*"(History of the Corsican language), and "*La Révolution Corse* 1729-1769" (The Corsican Revolution 1729-1769). And L'Adecec is also a publishing house dedicated to the exposition of Corsican history and culture.

E Voce di u Commune located in Pigna, a small village that has been completely renovated to house traditional artisanal shops, is also responsible for a large number of patrimoine-related activities, centering on musical and theatrical heritage. EVC is dedicated to research, analysis and practice of music and the arts. They created a sub-group, *A Cumpagnia* in 1978, dedicated to animating rural life. The group hosts social evenings of music, theater, and dance (*veghje)* at island-wide rural *foires* (fairs). The EVC also created a press to share its research, *Accademia d'I Vagabondi,* and la SARL Casa Editions (a publishing house). In 1985, EVC formed *Casa Musicale*, a performance space and music archive as well as a restaurant with rooms for guests. Today, the Casa is

devoted to traditional music performances and schooling. *Arte di a Musica* and *Festivoce* are successful festivals of music and voice held annually. (Morucci 2008)

These associations which today are icons of riacquistu activism are complemented by thousands of small local associations, and new ones continue to be created. On examining the records at the Corte *sous prefecture*, where villages of central Corsica register the creation of associations[xxviii], compared to the decade between the late 1950s and late 1960s, when the total number of associations remained below 150, in the 1970s, this number increases fivefold, and there is a notable shift in focus of the associations. In the 1950s, the organizations were generally socio-religious in character, responsible for organizing village festivities (*comités des fetes*—festivities committees) or groups organized to support the members of the community in need. In the late 1960s, associations begin to take on a cultural activist character using riacquistu discourse to describe their goals.

For example, in 1969, the group *Centre de promotion sociale de Corte* (Center of social promotion of Corte) was formed for the "*promotion sociale et culturelle des milieux ruraux corse pour l'apprentissage des techniques et l'artisanat manuel…*" (social and cultural promotion of Corsica's rural milieu in order to apprentice techniques and manual artisanal production…). In 1967, *Club U Respaghiu* was formed to "*maintenir les vieilles coutumes corse, folkore, chants corses…* (maintain traditional Corsican customs, folklore, Corsican song…). In 1969, *Scola e università* declares its "*lutte*" (fight) for the official recognition of Corsican language by the French State. In 1972, *Dio Vi Salvi Regina* [xxix] was formed to "*maintenir le gout et le culture des traditions, du*

folklore et de la langue corse" (maintain the taste and culture of Corsican traditions, folklore and the Corsican language).

With this shift toward riacquistu activism, the names of many associations changed from French to Corsican. In the 1950s and 60s, only one association had a Corsican name: *A Manella*, a "*groupe folklorique*" (folkloric group). By the 1970s, there were approximately 13 associations per year registered with Corsican names. In the 1980s, approximately 30 per year had Corsican names. And in the 1990s, the number was approximately 50 per year.

Originally, many of the associations promoted the apprenticeship of young Corsicans in the tradition and created "*maisons culturelles*,"(cultural houses) which sold and promoted the products made. And, as a result, many have succeeded in reviving ancient foires, which occur throughout the year and celebrate "*la production identitaire*" (wine, chestnut products, figs, cheese, artisanal products, etc). Today, there are 67 such fairs throughout the year. The two most successful, the cheese foire in May and the chestnut foire in December, boast attendance of between 30-50,000 people each (Ravis-Giordani 2004).[xxx]

Language Activism

In addition to Adecec, the associations *Lingua Corsa* and *Scola Corsa* were instrumental in the promotion of the Corsican language. They were responsible for the production of the first Corsican grammar books, spelling manuals and lexicons as well as other pedagogical works.[xxxi] They also organized language courses around the island and began the public campaign for the official recognition of Corsican as the regional language. The musical group, Canta u Populu Corsu, also played an important role in

language activism, propelling Corsican language into the public sphere as well as drawing young singers into a "total social practice in which speaking Corsican was required"(Jaffe 1999, 128).

Over the past 30 years, there has been a continued push for the production of literary and pedagogical texts in Corsican (see *Media* section below). This has included the introduction of literary events, book fairs, prizes and public debate and conferences on Corsican literature. In addition, language activists have successfully pushed to have Corsican used in parallel to French in the names of places, villages, and towns, as well as some public documents.

Political Action

Associative action overlaps with political action. And cultural activists have achieved impressive concessions from the French state. In 1973, a petition signed by 5000 militant students and nationalist sympathizers officially proposed Corsica's inclusion in the Deixonne Law, which would allow limited voluntary instruction in the "regional language." This proposal was brought to France's National Assembly by a Corsican member of the Assembly, and passed. In 1975, schools began to offer Corsican language instruction on a limited basis. Additionally, there were vast student protests and, in particular, the pressure of one student union at the University of Nice, the *Cunsulta di i Studienti Corsi* (Corsican Student Syndicate), to create a Corsican university on the island. The National government agreed to the demands, and in 1981, the Università di Corsica Pasquale Paoli (Université de Corse, Pascal Paoli) opened.

The dedication to Corsican cultural identity has been central to both UPC (formerly ARC) and FRC activism and discourse from the beginning. Thus, when

political concessions were made by the French State in the early 1980s, namely in the form of the establishment of the Collectivité Territoriale, attending to Corsican cultural specificity was central to the CTC's purview. As Savigear suggests, given that the Statut Particulier which gave rise to the CTC focused on Corsican specificity, once in place, the governing body had to "concern itself with the respect for and protection of this identity…particularly in cultural matters"(1990, 88). The 1989 *Contrat de Plan* (the state-region contract determining regional funding) made Corsica one of the regions of France with the highest spending on culture—a budget of 84.15 million francs over 5 years. This included funding to build the ethnographic Museum of Corte and the *Cinémathèque de Corse* (Corsican film archive). In 1993, Corsica officially created a chapter on Culture in its *Plan de Dévéloppement* (Development Plan). These efforts were in line with riacquistu aims focusing on revitalizing the interior, encouraging artistic development and exposure, valorizing Corsican memory, social and geographic promotion of cultural action. More than 30% of the 1994-1998 budget was dedicated to the construction of performance spaces for the promotion of traditional music and cultural tourism. (Bithell 2007, 213-221) The Corsican budget has increased from 12.65 million Euros in 1981 to 476 million Euros in 2004 (*Collectivité Territoriale de Corse's website*[xxxii]). And in 2002, the Corsican assembly was given exclusive control over its cultural policy.

Media

The mediatization and documentation of the patrimoine on Corsica has been a large aspect of the riacquistu from the beginning. As the historian and curator of the ethnographic museum in Corte, which opened its doors in 1997, told me, "there has been

more cultural and historical investigation of Corsica by Corsicans over the past 35 years than the 300 years before that."

Associations and nationalist groups alike often have press organs and publishing houses dedicated to circulating their findings. During Mitterrand's first presidential term from 1981-1999, patrimoine-related media on Corsica really flourished. In the prior decade, throughout the 1970s, Corsican radio (and all French regional radio) had been restricted from any broadcasting devoted to the promotion of regional languages and cultural identities.

In 1979, a Corsican station that had broadcast from Italy was condemned as "the voice of the FLNC" by the French government, and state forces eventually blew up the transmitter (Bithell 2007, 146). Mitterrand removed the ban on regional radio stations, and in 1981 *Alta Frequenza* (High Frequency), *Radio Voce Nustrale (*Radio Our Voice), and *Radio Corse Frequenza Mora* (Radio Corsica Customary Frequency), the three local radio stations, which dominate the air waves today, arose. The programming of these stations included the militant songs emerging during this time, reports of nationalist activities, as well as programming on riacquistu activities. In 1982, because of the efforts of two cultural activists Sampiero Sanguinetti and Jean-Marc Leccia, a daily television program called "*Corsica Sera*" (Corsica Evening) (now called "*Via Stella*") was launched on France 3. Over the last 20 years, these media sources have continued to flourish and expand. The daily television news is presented twice daily in Corsican. And weekly television specials have developed. Some are in Corsican, and many featuring local artisans and describe cultural events.

Today *Frequenza Mora* is the most listened to radio station on the island (study conducted by *Médiamétrie* 2009-2010), and its programming, while not limited to, is structured around patrimoine news-related items. The station works in conjunction with the local newspaper, *Corse-Matin,* and *Via Stella*, reporting the same local events, interviewing the same local figures, and creating a coherent and self-enforced world of media overflowing with riacquistu identity discourse.

Discourse Engagé

As Dressler-Holohan suggests, the riacquistu's aim has been to "restructure the symbolic field" (1987, 315) of Corsican identity. And, ostensibly, this aim has been inordinately successful. The multitudes of ethnographic, historical, journalistic, archeological reports of Corsican culture that fill the library, bookstores, and magazine racks, the constant media presence of this cultural information, as well as the ubiquity of militant music, and the continued political and associative action devoted to cultural revindication, provide powerful frames through which Corsican identity is most commonly represented.

However, it is in light of the generic, almost disengaged feeling of this dominant cultural symbology that I became interested in what is locally called the "*discours engagé."* This talk, which is never far off when one comes in contact with a symbol of Corsican identity, whether cheese, chestnuts, singing, or images of Pascal Paoli, can feel rehearsed. Ultimately, however, it was in the course of talking to people about their relationship to their activism that cracks in the symbolic wall began to emerge. Between tired tropes that I had heard again and again, passion and deep sentiment would begin to

reveal themselves. The rest of the dissertation examines the layers of this discourse. But first, here are several examples that one comes across most frequently.

Riacquistu Discourse

Although the cultural militants I interviewed certainly did sometimes express sentiments about French oppression, they were more interested in talking about their commitment to the "*vrai*" Corsican tradition, culture, and identity. For cultural militants, the riacqiustu has been about a "*prise de conscience*" (realization, taking consciousness) of who they are. It has been about features of Corsican culture that have always existed becoming known, realized, in a new and powerful way. The movement has not been a *renaissance,* a "re-birth" of Corsican culture and identity, but a re-acquisition with the force of an awakening. As Bithell puts it, "for those…coming into contact with the living…tradition…its discovery had the force of a spiritual conversion"(2004, 118). The liner notes of one of Canta u Populu Corsu's first albums reads, "With the decidedly epic ring and its recourse to religious language, it creates an image of the group as musical missionaries, while enjoining the public to unite in their sacred duty to safeguard their precious heritage which outside forces are contriving to stifle"(Bithell 2007, 118).

Thiers

Jacques Thiers, a famous riacquistu activist and head of the CCU (cultural studies program at the University), known for his foundational contributions to language activism on the island as well as for his work as a playwright, and his cultural militancy in a general sense, told me about his engagement in the movement.

> I was never a good student in school…intelligent, but not a good student…. After high school, I became interested in languages and got my degree in Latin on the continent and started teaching. One day I was teaching a class to a number of older Corsicans, and I wrote a Latin phrase on the blackboard, and one of the

> students looked up and said, 'That's Corsican!' I looked, and he was right, it was very close to Corsican. Corsican at that time [in the 1960s] was not really written. It was a spoken language, learned at home, spoken with friends…It was not taught in school…I was taken aback…why was this language, one I had always spoken, one that was so familiar to me, so close to me, not written? How could I not have considered this before? What was the formal grammar? What were the variations? What *was* this language that was so much mine?...

Catherine

Catherine, who was a university student in Nice in the early years of the riacquistu and today is a researcher and teacher of the Corsican traditional song, described riacquistu activism in this way:

> Young people went home to their villages [from the continent] and began to collect and write down and save traditions, rites, songs…and ways of thinking and being and expressing. These things had been for years threatened by the French state… This is who we *really* are and it had been hidden from us…stolen from us. We realized how important it was to *prendre consciousness.* I really think, we came back just in time, came back to our home to save it from being totally swallowed…"

She talked about the sense of urgency, a fear of "losing people who could give real testimony…time was running out to learn first hand, to experience, the real transmission of our own culture." She told me that in the sphere of music in the beginning, "little *équipes* went out to work on music, collect songs that would otherwise die with the oldest generation…. We were impassioned by the territory that we inhabited, that was our own, by the need to save that which is dying everyday…"

Pazzoni

Bernard Pazzoni, another cultural militant, well known for his field recordings and knowledge of the Island's violin tradition, writes in his most recent album notes (2008):

> Fieldwork is important in order to recover the repertoire that existed in earlier eras, the instruments, the means of existence of this music, of celebration, of

> general atmosphere. Local practices have evolved as people's daily lives have moved toward the cities, the occasions of celebration have changed and hardly provide us with the possibility of '*les chants de circonstances'* [songs of circumstance] born spontaneously. However, the life of the Corsican village allows us to meet those who play and sing….the rhythm of life and the relation with nature allow this music to be born and be transmitted mouth to ear, without writing, fortified by the silence of the mountains. (*A Sulana*, L'Anfarti, 2008)

Etienne

When I interviewed Etienne, a young shepherd who apprenticed under his father and considers himself a shepherd in the "traditional" sense, and a producer of "authentic" Corsican cheese, I suggested that the *berger* (shepherd), the goat, and the traditional cheese are great symbols of Corsica. He jumped on it. "Yes, it is our patrimoine, and this is why it is so important to continue. We, among ourselves, say we are *fou* (crazy), but we are soldiers, soldiers to save the patrimoine. People buy our product because it is not like the industrial cheese, because it has an authentic flavor, made the way it was made in the *vrai* tradition…"

Patrizia

After a number of months on the island, I had the chance to interview Patrizia Gattaceca, a cultural militant, a famous singer of polyphonic music, one of the few female riacquistu icons. Her group, "*Les Nouvelles Polyphonies Corse*" rose to international fame in 1992 when they played at the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Albertville, televised to millions across the world. On the day I met her, I had the sense that I had seen her before, and I couldn't figure out why. Midway into our conversation I realized: she had been pictured on the cover of a magazine I had bought the week before. Her soft hazel eyes and angelic regard were the same as the close up portrait on the cover of *CORSICA, L'Autre Regarde sur La Corse* (Corsica, The Other

Look on Corsica), a monthly magazine. She was, the article reported, the woman who had harbored Yvan Colonna, the Nationalist on trial for the assassination of the French prefect. Patrizia had harbored Colonna for a large portion of the 6 years he had been on the run. She was now being investigated.

I had already gotten the sense that asking about Nationalist activity directly was taboo, so I proceeded with caution, asking about her involvement in the riacquistu,

> In fact, it arose around the Corsican language. When I became interested in the Corsican language, in a conscious way, with the idea of promoting it, it was around '75, '76. It was in my last years of high school that I realized we have a patrimonial richness that I felt deeply, that I wanted to protect in me. It brought me back to my childhood memories in my village, it sticks to me like my skin…it was a deep part of my being, and I realized it was necessary that I invest myself in it…During this time, at this moment, for me we were very motivated because…for me personally, I had this motivation…but we were also pushed by our teachers of Corsican who had begun this movement…

I then asked about her music and songwriting.

> In terms of poetry, I worked a lot with my father. He was very embedded in his culture, practiced the traditional versification…it was an obvious "*fait cuturel*"[cultural fact] for that generation…it was people who live permanently in poetry and song…each occasion festive or not, the chant was there, poetry also…when I got interested in poetry, I approached my dad and we worked together, he guided me…It happened to me like this, without the idea of professionalization, but to enrich myself and to reappropriate this patrimoine that I have in me and was in the process of disappearing…I wanted to really see it blossom, blossom in me.

Our conversation went on at length, and she slipped in and out of tropes surrounding identity and patrimoine that I was beginning to identify as standards of this discourse engagé. Just at I was beginning to wonder, as I almost always did in interviews with cultural militants, about the genuineness of what she was saying, about the character of her commitment, she mentioned her 19-year-old son. I didn't know she had a son. She told me that the past 6 months had been difficult for her because since her

indictment, she had been placed in legal custody (she is not allowed to leave the island). And her son is detained in Paris. Because he was 18 while Colonna had been harbored in their home, her son was considered an accomplice. She hasn't seen him in half a year. "It's very difficult…for a 19-year old. You know he was hit by a guard? He, who hasn't done anything. They questioned him on his knees for hours. It's been psychologically very taxing. Very hard for him. Now I wait for trial." Her face, which I had found captivating for the entire interview, brilliant, and expressive, at this moment became shadowed, and she looked old, more like a mother than a militant, and I caught myself, ashamed of my earlier doubt. She may have sacrificed not only herself for these beliefs, but also her son.

Conclusion

The riacquistu was inspired and inspiring for young Corsicans of the late 1960s and 70s because, like Jacques Thiers, these cultural militants came in contact with features of their identity that they felt were fundamental to who they were but that they hadn't considered "consciously" before. It was, in a sense, a confrontation with the fact of their particularity—as if one could hear her own voice speaking her native language as only a foreigner can, and gasp at its fluency and brilliance. It was a revelation about a truth whose greatness does not lie in identifiable features that set the Corsican language and culture above or beyond other languages or cultures, but from the simple fact of its *actual* existence and reality, which had, in a sense, gone unrealized.

On the one hand, riacquistu activism was designed to push beyond folkloric stereotypes of Corsican culture and rigorously investigate, document, and valorize traditional artisanal, artistic, and cultural products. On the other hand, for militants, the

movement was driven by what activist Jacques Fusina saw as a "souci d'authenticité" (concern over authenticity) (cited in Dressler-Holohan 1997,315). Built into this cultural project, as Dressler-Holohan suggests, was a preoccupation with *L'essezza* (essence), which translated into discovery of the "*l'esprit de l'être corse*" (the spirit of being Corsican) (1997, 315).

The next chapter will turn to look at how social movements, like the riacquistu, in which militant groups are preoccupied with their own authenticity and essence, have generally been understood in the contemporary anthropological scholarship. I will then return to Corsica, and we will see that despite the remarkable accomplishments of riacquistu activism, an important part of the movement is defined today by struggle and anxiety.

After spending decades identifying the components of the vrai Corsican tradition, language and identity--researching them, documenting them, representing them, and orchestrating them anew--many of today's cultural militants are confronting an important aspect of this cultural identity that they feel has been damaged, damage inflicted by the very act of investigation and representation. Today's militants are constantly trying to reframe the details they have discovered, to infuse them with a "reality" and integrity they feel has been lost. What began as a positively enlightening confrontation with identity has become, in a sense, a tragic struggle for reconstruction. It is in light of this struggle, and an unusually heightened and self-aware sense of identity anxiety among many of today's Corsican militants, that we must reconsider what contemporary anthropological theory expects to be the source of movements of this sort.

[xix] See Wolf and Cordell's analysis of ethnopolitics in contemporary Europe (2004)

[xx] In May 1968, thousands of university students protested and eleven million workers went on strike for 2 weeks. Among a number of greivances, groups rejected modern consumer and technical society, espousing left-wing positions criticizing the authoritarianism of Western capitalism.

[xxi] French regions began to mobilize to reclaim their cultural identity, often co-opting slogans of the Algerian cause for their own behalf. As Silverstein writes, "The Algerian War in particular served as a crystallizing moment for many…militants in the radicalization of their political beliefs, taking on for themselves the image of the Algerian fellagha (peasant)" (1997).

[xxii] Literally, "black feet," pied noirs were people of French origin living in Algeria during French rule. Supposedly, one way the colonists could be distinguished from the indigenous Algerians was by the black shoes the French wore, resulting in the term *pied noir.*

[xxiii] Corsica's Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale di a Corsica*,* based its name on the Algerian militant group FLN, Front de Libération Nationale.

[xxiv] Corsica has had a powerful mafia network involved in drug trafficking, prostitution and gambling since the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1960s and 70s, it was central to the international heroin traffic ring known as the "French Connection". Today, several gangs are still active on the island, and gang rivalry has resulted in approximately 20 murders in Corsica over the past 3 years.

However, the link between the mafia and the Nationalist movement is precarious. As Crettiez (1990) suggests,

> the existence of the Mafia on Corsica is very much a reality (just as it is in many other French regions), the recent comparison between nationalist politics and this kind of criminal enterprise, seems a bit hasty. More than a product of mafia involvement, the questionable evolution of certain factions of the nationalist movement depends on a Corsican logic of clientelism, which has little to do with large scale transnational criminality"(244).

He argues that the Mafia activity aims at financial gain which, he suggests, is very different, from the goals of the nationalist party, which are not primarily financial but "symbolic: to contest the national state's…monopoly of the island territory"(244). Unlike the mafia, the nationalists are looking ultimately for electoral power, and thus it is important that they be recognized publicly for their actions. "Clandestine" nationalist groups, wearing masks and carrying machine guns show up, frequently on the covers of magazines, and rather than a danger to them, this publicity is their central to their political goals. Explicitly illegal Mafia activity (drugs, prostitution) are typically rejected by Corsican nationalists as "threats" to the Corsican tradition. Nationalist political graffiti that plasters the walls of cities and villages includes anti-French statements like *Francese fora* (French get out!), as well as anti-mafia slogans "*Mafia fora*!" or " *a droga fora*!" (Drugs out!)

However, members of the Mafia, like members of the nationalist party, do not exist apart from the social reality of the island. In our village, there were the elected officials, people involved in Mafia activity, as well as nationalists. These features of people's identities were secondary to their standing in their family friend network, though their standing was certainly affected by their activities in these realms. However,

alliances existed between members of these different vertical groups, creating obligations and connections that overlapped in important and complex ways.

[xxv] Satut Particulier, Loi n°82-214 du 2 mars 1982 portant statut particulier de la région de Corse: organisation administrative.

[xxvi] For example: *La Recherche archeologique prehistorique et prohistorique en Corse* (Vaccarezza and Weiss*,* 1985); *La Corse, Une Affaire de Famille* (Guidicelli, ed. 1984), *Language Corse: incertitudes et Paris* (Ettori and Fusina, 1980), *La Corse entre nationalisme et clanism—illogique ou fatalité* (Franceschi, 1991), *Culture Corse Ancestral, culture francaise importante: la vie Corse durant le XXième siècle* (Murati 1983), *Des Corse á part entière* (Ottavi, 1979)

[xxvii] These associations are created in the accordance with a law dating from July 1901 according to which groups gathered in associative form are required to be registered with the nearest sous préfecture, and are entered into the Journel Officiel de la République Francaise Lois et Décrets, which includes a statement of their obejctives.

[xxviii] I was granted access to Corte's sous prefecture's association records during November and December of 2009.

[xxix] Dio Vi Salvi Regina is the name of a hymn to the Virgin Mary, which is considered Corsica's national anthem. At the end of the 11th century, the bishop of Puy, Adhemar de Monteil wrote in Latin the Salve Regina, a hymn dedicated to the Virgin Mary. At the end of the 17th century, Jesuit Francesco de Geronimo, who did service in the poorest parts of Naples, translated it into Italian. When Neapolitan clergy went to preach on Corsica, the hymn became known on the island. When adopted as the "Corsican hymn" in 1735, following the revolt of the Corsicans against the Genoese, many of the Italian words were replaced by Corsican words. The Corsicans changed the text from a religious song to a war song: in their version, the Virgin Mary is not evoked to protect the most destitute, but to protect Corsicans against their enemies (Bithell 2007).

[xxx] The notion of an "*économie identitaire*," (economy of identity) appeared for the first time on June 15, 1992 in a text published by *La Corse-Provencal,* and the following year, in 1993, a convention was organized by Corsica's regional government to consider the économie identitaire as "a model of development as well as voicing the will to overcome the opposition between economy and identity."(12) Ten months later, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (CESCC) was organized to promote this end.

[xxxi] Corsica's first official grammar book was, Albertini's Petite Grammaire Corse published in 1968.

[xxxii] http://www.corse.fr/1991-naissance-d-une-collectivite-territoriale-specifique_a393.html

Chapter IV
Nationalist, Ethnic and Cultural Revitalization Movements in Contemporary Anthropological Scholarship

Over the past few decades, ethnographic accounts of social movements for the re-vindication or revitalization of a group's "authentic" or "essential" identity have been dominated by a theoretical orientation according to which convictions about the "essential" identity of the nation, ethnic group, or tradition are thought to be ideological constructions (Linnekin 1991, 1992, Trevor-Roper 1983, Handler 1984, Wagner 1975). While anthropologists argue over what gives rise to these ideologies, and the means by which they are embedded in people's belief systems and their ontological status, [xxxiii] there is a general consensus that these essentialist assertions do *not* act referentially, describing an objective or "concrete" state of affairs.

As Thomas Hylland Eriksen writes in *Ethnicity and Nationalism,*

> It has become a standard procedure for anthropologists to polemicize against the 'misplaced concreteness' involved in the reifications of culture, whether they are undertaken by natives or by anthropologists. It has been repeatedly stressed that ethnic identities, groups and beliefs of shared culture and history are *creations*… (2002, 91)

Today, the scholarly focus on revealing that ideals of essential group identity are contingent cultural products arises from, as Foster puts it, "recent shifts in anthropological thinking about culture"(1997,4). Linnekin suggests that

> the premise that culture is symbolically constructed or "invented" has become a hallmark of social-science scholarship…Cultural invention is part of the intellectual *zeitgeist* of the 1980s and 1990s…[which] can be traced to a…general dissatisfaction with positivist and objectivist approaches to culture and related concepts [tradition, identity, etc.] in Western scholarship. (1992, 249)

In this chapter, I will outline the shifts in the field's intellectual landscape over the

past few decades, which Foster and Linnekin refer to, and the line of reasoning that has generally been used to support these shifts. I will also describe how this anti-essentialist theoretical orientation has largely determined the kinds of ethnographic accounts that are written about local assertions of national, ethnic, or cultural identity, like the ones seen on Corsica. Ultimately, in the next chapters, we will see that the claims made by the Corsican militants I studied do not fit within the current analytic framework, urging us to reconsider the anthropological approach to these questions.

The Theoretical Landscape

Since the late 1960s in cultural anthropology, "essentialist" understandings, grounding objectivist or positivist ideas about cultural, have come under serious criticism. Essentialism, as defined by Fuss (1989), "is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity." (xi-xii) Ayer (1984) describes essentialism as an analytic process by which

> Objects…originally grouped under a single heading because they appear to manifest some high degree of similarity are subsequently found to share a common underlying structure. Not only that, but it is their common possession of this structure that serves to explain the phenomena which initially led to their being sorted into different kinds. (1984, 267)

From an anthropological standpoint, an essentialist theoretical orientation is one in which cultural traits are grouped according to their apparent "high degree of similarity." These similarities are then analyzed and found to be united according to an underlying principle (structural, functional, evolutionary, or other), which becomes the foundational explanation for the similarities observed. Always and everywhere, cultural traits, behaviors, and beliefs, in real time, exhibit some degree of differentiation. From an

essentialist orientation, these differences are considered extraneous contingencies to be sloughed off through analysis in order to identify the inherent "whatness" of the phenomenon--found in the stable, fixed, and homogeneous features across cases.

As Lakoff puts it, traditionally social scientists have tended to "understand (and hence define) an object entirely in terms of a set of its inherent properties"(2003, 122). These "inherent properties" have been thought to consist of what Shweder calls the "invariant content" of the phenomenon in question. When "invariance gets large enough it becomes 'general' and we call it 'deep structure'" (Shweder 1984, 32).

Anthropological theory, since Franz Boas's call for contextualization at the turn of the 20th century, has been concerned with the relative nature of categories, or as Ayer puts it above, "groupings."[xxxiv] Clifford Geertz's work in the 1970s pushed these concerns to a new theoretical plane when he argued for a shift in disciplinary focus, away from the identification of the cultural object and towards the interpretation of cultural meanings. In the *Interpretation of Cultures,* Geertz argues that in order to understand what cultural actors are up to in any given situation, one must access their meanings, a position which required a new analytic disposition. From his point of view, it was not just a matter of identifying local groupings, patterns or categories through which a particular culture orders objective reality. Rather, for Geertz, according to a "semiotic" understanding of culture, "human behavior [must be] seen as…symbolic action—action which, like phonation in speech, pigment in painting, line in writing, or sonance in music, signifies"(1977,10). From this point of view, human behaviors and words point beyond themselves, but not in a one-to-one relationship to the "objective world." Rather, they point beyond themselves to complex, and entangled webs of already existing meaning in

which they make sense. The search for the coherent, natural cultural object gave way to the search for networks of meaning.

In the 1980s, a more extreme form of anti-essentialism surfaced, and, to an important extent, parted ways with Geertz's interpretivism. Geertz's suggestion that understanding culture is a matter of interpretation not objective reference was not enough for proponents of what came to be called "New Ethnography"(Abu-Lughod 1991, Marcus and Fischer 1988), who were increasingly taken by deconstructivist logic. This was because, from their point of view, interpretive ethnography still analyzed cultural realities with an eye towards a coherent vision of the webs of significance that make local lives meaningful.

As Rabinow put it,

> Geertz (like the other anthropologists) is still directing his efforts to reinvent an anthropological science with the help of textual mediations. The core activity is still social description of the other, however modified by new conceptions of discourse, author, or text." (1986, 242)

This new wave of criticism pushed the hermeneutically provocative premises, which Geertz's work had introduced, to their limits, resulting in what has been referred to as the *crisis of representation* (Marcus and Fischer 1986) or the *crisis of ethnographic authority* (Clifford 1983) in the field of anthropology. Scholars began to question the justification for unifying analyses *period*. They began to ask whether it was possible to accesses natives' meanings, and how they could account for the authority of their own ethnographic renderings, and ultimately, about the validity of the concept of Culture. (Crapanzano 1986, Clifford 1983, Marcus 1980, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Asad 1986, Rabinow 1986, Jacobs-Huey 2002, Dirks 1994; Gupta 1992; Herbert 1991, Abu-Lughod 1991, Behar 1995).

These theoretical struggles marked an epistemological shift in the field. The analytic process of identifying the constitutive and "essential" features of a cultural phenomenon, in order to identify *what* it is (whether objectively or in relation to meaningful categories), was no longer unproblematic. Both the analytic process and the picture of cultural realities it produced became subject to scrutiny. New ethnography, it was argued, should present specific life stories and texts and voices, and reject the concept of "Culture" in favor of Foucault's notion of "discourse" and Bourdieu's understanding of "practice," (see below) which were thought to be "useful because they work against the assumption of boundedness, not to mention the idealism . . .of the culture concept" (Abu-Lughod 1991, 148).

Though not all cultural anthropologists have embraced the full extent of this epistemological overhaul, which has led some to encourage anthropological writing that is *in principle* fragmented, non-totalistic, non-homogenized (Abu-Lughod 1991, Behar 1995, Clifford and Marcus 1986); there has been a pervasive re-centering of contingency, differentiation and heterogeneity in theories of culture since the 1970s, and in particular in theories of group identity. Typical justifications for this re-centering focus on the fact that cultures are never static, singular, fixed, bounded or uncontested and that meanings are not constant but constantly made and remade. As Hall puts it, cultures

> are never unified… never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation" (2000, 17).

And, as Foster puts it, the assertion of an authentic national or ethnic culture

> is always a contested construct, precisely because it is never singular: multiple constructs invariably compete with each other for unquestioned and widespread

> acceptance. Produced by a variety of agents…with a variety of interests…these constructs circulate in heterogeneous forms…(Foster 1997, 5).

And, as Fox (1991) suggests, the "character and puissance" of essentialist ideals of ethnic, national or cultural identity are "matters of historical practice; they are plastic constructions, not cultural givens…"(4) the production of which is "a fluid process rooted in power, domination and human interests"(10).

Nationalism and Ethnic Identity

The anthropological suspicion of essentialist notions of culture is pronounced in the anthropological scholarship on national, ethnic, and cultural identity claims for two reasons. First, these are cases in which essentialist identity ideals are publicly (and often passionately) articulated, and the discrepancy between them and the reality on the ground is particularly visible and ethnographically accessible. Secondly, these movements are important because essentialist notions of group identity were mobilized for particularly destructive ends during the 20th century. Post World War II awareness of the way in which homogeneous, bounded, ideals of the group, of modernity, of progress and of human potential, can be harnessed by powerful political entities and used to stigmatize and discipline their subjects in the name of objectively "improving society," has led anthropologists to conscientiously and importantly expose the role of essentialism in the ideological construction of group identities.

Barth

The logic grounding the anthropological rejection of essentialist group identity claims is often traced to Frederik Barth's 1969 work on the nature of ethnic groups and boundaries. [xxxv] The major thrust of Barth's argument is that if one looks on the ground for the properties that are claimed to make up the inherent "object" of cultural or ethnic

identity—a pure language, an immemorial heritage, a bounded and fixed geographical location, etc.—these properties are never as "regular" or "fixed" or "pure" as they claim to be. Rather, what you find when you really look, is that no language is pure, heritages are messy conglomerations rather than pure lineages, and boundaries have *always* shifted and changed. The "purity" of the elements that make up true identity simply doesn't exist. Thus, the object of these claims, the "essence" itself, cannot be located.

As Clifford argues, one cannot identify invariant constants of group identity because "all the critical elements…are in specific conditions replaceable: language, land, blood, leadership, religion. Recognized, viable tribes exist in which any one or even most of these elements are missing, replaced, or largely transformed…"(1988:338).

And, as Handler and Linnekin suggest,

> The problem…is that the boundaries of such things are inevitably "fuzzy" for both actors and observers. Having chosen to describe social facts as if they were natural objects, one is embarrassed to find out that one cannot definitively bound them in space and time, although such boundedness is necessary to satisfy our understanding of what a natural object is. **(**1984, 275)

Barth was one of the first to argue that groups are defined, not by some primordial essence, some identifiable cultural "stuff," as the "primordialist" school of thought had previously held, [xxxvi] but by certain socio-political forces that determine the boundaries defining one as a "member" or as a "non-member." Based on this proposition, Barth proposes a three-part approach to understanding essentialist notions of group identity:

> First, a primary emphasis in the fact that ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves…Second, we attempt to explore the different processes that seem to be involved in generating and maintaining ethnic groups. Third, to observe these processes we shift the locus of investigation from the internal constitution and history of separate groups to ethnic boundaries and maintenance. (10)

As Ardener puts it, "Ethnicities…have no imperative relationship with particular 'objective' criteria" (1989, 111). The critical focus of investigation, from this point of view, has become the forces that "define the group, not the *stuff* that it encloses"(Smith 1998, 15).

Foucault and Bourdieu

Because this line of anthropological argument suggests that people's assertions about the essence of their cultural, ethnic or national identity do not refer to a "primordial" state of affairs, anthropologists are put in a position to explain *why* local actors insist that they do. As Linnekin (1991) puts it, "However effectively scholars deconstruct authenticity and reveal it to be an intellectual red herring, the concept remains nonetheless entrenched in popular thought and is an emotional, political issue for indigenous peoples…" (446). The work of Foucault and Bourdieu has been particularly influential in forming a theoretical response to this problem for anthropologists.

Foucault

Foucault argues that ideological ideals about the way the world is govern *all* systems of thought and knowledge. He suggests that what he calls "epistemes" or "discursive formations" determine the regularities perceived to be true or essential in all societies. These regularities, rather than being natural, as they are perceived by local inhabitants, are, in fact, socially constituted; and, what is vital, they are effective because their constructedness is *imperceptible*.

In other words, the natural order of our worlds that we take to be self-evident is "at once controlled, selected, organized and distributed according to a certain number of procedures…"(1972, 216). National standards for educational programs, for medical

practice, for industrial processes and products, are primary examples Foucault gives in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) of what he calls discursive formations. From this point of view, "epistemes," control what people feel it is possible to think or know, in any given cultural realm or historical period. Local beliefs that the given order of things is *real* or *essential* are proof of the episteme's power, but not its truth.

In particular, for Foucault, ideals of essential cultural identity, like those seen on Corsica, are the result of a *particularly* powerful discursive formation that arose in Enlightenment Europe in accordance with the forces of modernization. He argues that in the seventeenth century, a "will to knowledge" emerged which

> sketched out a schema of possible, observable, measurable and classifiable objects; a will to knowledge which imposed upon the knowing subject—in some ways taking precedence over all experience—a certain position, a certain viewpoint, and a certain function…a will to knowledge which prescribed…the technological level at which knowledge could be employed in order to be verifiable and useful. (1972, 218)

The kind of knowledge that could be produced by observing and measuring classifiable objects acquired a privileged position, such that people were increasingly driven to understand the world exclusively in its terms.

A practical consequence of this, and a defining feature of modernity for Foucault, is that group judgments about who is "normal" or "abnormal" or who "count" or "don't count," based on a rationalist framework that defends the notion of "natural" categories making up the world, are pernicious and pervasive. He argues that this is markedly different from previous forms of explicit and force-based social control (1972, 1977). The ideology and bureaucratic practices of the modern Nation State, and the nationalist, ethnic and cultural discourses they provoke, are particularly complicit in these forms of discipline and control. [xxxvii]

Bourdieu

Bourdieu's influential notion of *habitus* in his theory of practice (1997) suggests that the realities that people perceive to be indisputable or essential have a powerful hold over them specifically *because* the contingency of these ideals is not apparent to them. *Habitus,* as he puts it, is the "endless capacity to engender products--thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions--whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of production..."(1977, 95). They are the historically contingent social norms that guide people's dispositions and attitudes, including importantly, the notion of reality. As Bourdieu suggests:

> Every established order tends to produce…the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is undoubtedly…the *sense of limits,* commonly called the *sense of reality*...(1977, 164).

Bourdieu's provocative point, not unlike Foucault's, is that the feeling that the regularities of habitus are a mark of its essential reality is a primordial illusion insofar as habitus's capacity to structure the world comes not from some fixed natural law (according to God, Nature, or Mind), but simply from practice--the fact that people continue to abide by the structures and see them as necessary and natural. As he puts it, the person convinced of the essential condition of his reality is "ignorant…of the objective truth about his practical mastery (which is that it is ignorant of its own truth)"(1997, 19).

These influential theoretical positions aim to reveal that essentialized constructions of the Real or the True are central to all human societies, and are inherently contingent and ideological, gaining their force from people's inability to see this very fact. Much anthropological scholarship has embraced these works, to differing degrees,

for their theoretical exposition of the role that ideology, power, and historical contingency *always* play in the production of knowledge, culture, identity and reality.

Ethnographic Examples

From these points of departure, the anthropological approach to understanding movements waged in the name of essential identity, whether national, ethnic or cultural, has largely been 1) to reveal that local assertions of essential cultural identity or authentic tradition do not describe a coherent set of homogeneous, fixed, empirical conditions; 2) to identify the socio, political and economic motivation(s) behind essentialist ideals in particular cases and the means by which they are instantiated in the public imagination; 3) to reveal the ways in which the essentialist claims are linked to objectivist notions of cultural, modernity, and progress, problematic legacies of Enlightenment thought; and 4) to suggest that local essentialist claims are complicit (either consciously or unconsciously) in the relations of power and domination that have long been enabled by such notions.

Consider Handler's ethnographic work on nationalism in Quebec (1988). Handler focuses on fairs, festivals, and folklore exhibits as well as aspects of everyday discourse, which, he argues, lead to the "continual 'objectification' of what is imagined to be [authentic] Quebecois culture" (14). Handler argues that the local conviction of a true Quebecois nation is grounded in ideas about the nation being "bounded and continuous, and…homogeneous" (14). But, where his informants generally agree on these *frames*, Handler argues, there is much confusion surrounding the *content* of the frames. His ethnographic account focuses on the "difference in the centrality accorded to Catholicism, to ruralism, to political independence, and to other issues" (32), and this

leads him to doubt the local assertions that "'a' nation, grounded in history, exists 'in' Quebec"(18). The conviction of an objective nation, he argues, is not based on "solid facts"(19), but is a product of "naturalistic and objectifying presuppositions"(18), like metaphors of environment and survival and notions of deep historical beginnings etc.. His driving analytic point is that essentialist presuppositions about local cultural identity have seeped into local activism as a result of the infiltration of hegemonic Enlightenment ideals about culture, largely as a result of social scientific (namely, anthropological) adoptions of these ideas. As he puts it, his "book is about the metaphors of boundedness, continuity, and homogeneity that both nationalist ideology and social-scientific discourse presuppose"(8).

The trajectory of Handler's argument is not uncommon. In a similar vein, Alexandra Jaffe's 1999 ethnography about language politics and ideology on Corsica considers local assertions of an "essential" Corsican language. Jaffe argues that language essentialism arose in a wave of activism that "resisted the outcomes of French language domination but did not resist its *structures of value*." In what she calls a "*resistance of reversal"* (273), she argues that language activists tried to unify and homogenize the Corsican language as well as implant ideas about "authentic" language learning and use, as a strategy for shoring up local power. But, she argues, these strategies themselves construct notions of "true" Corsican identity that are deeply problematic in that they *maintain* rather that contest the underlying visions of culture and language that the French have imposed over more than 200 years. Jaffe suggests, like Terdiman (1991), that these "counter-discourses…implicitly invoke a principle of order just as systematic as that which sustains the discourses they seek to subvert" (Jaffe 1991, 23). This line of

argument suggests that, as Herzfeld has put it, "the essentialism of the nation-state may provoke massive outbreaks of essentializing in response"(1997, 167).

Like Handler, Jaffe's understanding of the "problematic" visions of culture and language that Corsican essentialism adopts are ideals of culture and language that require "perfect congruence between linguistic, cultural and political boundaries…[and] that those boundaries are 'natural' and impermeable, and enclose internally homogeneous systems"(1999, 23). Rather than valid assertions about Corsican language and culture, Corsican essentialism reproduces a "value structure" in which homogeneity is the indication of authenticity. This is, Jaffe argues, a byproduct of "European discourse about language and nation identity…" (190), and must be contested.

Michael Herzfeld is well known for his ethnographic consideration of the Greek struggle between reified ideologies of Greece as bearer of Western civilization and competing essentialist claims of "what it means in practice" to be Greek. While, like Handler and Jaffe, Herzfeld implicates Enlightenment ideals of "affixed, eternal identity grounded in universal truth…"(1997, 5) in local essentialist formulations of culture and identity, he also argues that we have to recognize the "ordinary use" and "strategic character of essentialism"(1997, 26). Rather than understanding the essentializing of identity as a unified phenomenon—powerful elites tapping into dominant Enlightenment ideals about human communities—Herzfeld argues that *all* people engage in essentializing practices as a "cover for social action"(2), for all kinds of different reasons.

In an attempt to de-center analyses of "essentialism," his ethnography strives to show that individuals (state officials and the populous alike) use principles of national purity as "strategies of self-interest"(9), deploying "the debris of the past for all kinds of

present purposes"(24). Rather than presenting us with a unilateral analysis of essentialist claims about Greek culture, Herzfeld's goal is to show them to be fragmented and differentially motivated. As he puts it, his book aims, "to stop treating both the nation-state and essentialism as distant and unreachable enemies of everyday experience, and to understand them instead as integral aspects of social life"(2).

In keeping with the arguments put forth by Jaffe and Herzfeld, John Comaroff (1995) distinguishes two types of nationalist sentiment: *Euronationalisms* of 18th and 19th century Europe, which claim a historical origin of the nation and envision a secular, sovereign state founded on principles of citizenship and the social contract; and *Ethnonationalisms*, which place cosmology over chronology, accord themselves primordial roots, and ground themselves in essential cultural traits (163-164). This framework is used to distinguish between nationalism as perpetuated by the imperial powers of modern Europe and the explosion of more recent essentialist ideals about the nation or ethnic group, which are seen to be a result of "local struggles against European hegemony" (Comaroff 1995). As Said puts it in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), the notion of community essence, whether "'Celtic spirit,' [or]'Islam'… have much to do not only with…native manipulators...but also with the embattled imperial contexts out of which they came and in which they were felt to be necessary"(1993,16). [xxxviii]

A different anthropological take on ethnic and national identity is seen in the work of Foster (2002) and Billig (1995), who take for granted that essentialist claims about the nation, ethnic group or cultural tradition are unsubstantiated. Rather than adding to the literature that "proves" this by revealing the heterogeneity of cultural realities and exposing how essentialism is mobilized for social action, these

ethnographies look at the way in which problematic Enlightenment ideals of homogeneity and essence are embedded in ordinary consciousnesses, what Billig calls "banal nationalism." Foster focuses on the commodification of the nation in ordinary practice, arguing that the nation "unfolds not only (perhaps even primarily) through organized programs of political socialization, but also through mundane engagements with radio show programs, commodities ranging from locally made tinned meat to globally marketed soft drinks" (2002, 2).

Where the ethnographies written today about local essentialisms identify different reasons, some unified and some fragmented, for why people passionately invoke the existence of their own "cultural," "national," or "ethnic" essence, anthropological accounts are virtually all aligned in the idea that passionate invocations of the "essence" of the group are not reflections of objective conditions but, in one way or another, a problematic extension of Enlightenment ideology about the "legitimate" bases for group identity.

Modernism

As Foster has suggested,

> The two dominant tropes of contemporary talk about nations [are]: imagination (Anderson 1983) and invention (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Both tropes direct attention to the processes and means by which interested agents create and circulate images and ideals of nationhood and hence definitions of collective and personal identity. Both tropes, moreover, communicate a notion of fabrication…(1991, 4)[xxxix]

Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Hobsbawm and Ranger's *Invented Traditions* belong to the "modernist" school of thought, which holds that nations and nationalism are relatively new social phenomena arising from the large scale socio-political and economic changes characteristic of "modernity." Most analyses of this sort

have roots in classic sociological dualisms like Durkheim's *mechanical* versus *organic* society, Tonnies's *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*; Dumont's *universitas* and *societas,* and the consideration of alienation or *anomie* built into modern condition (Marx 1988, Durkheim 1997). They tend to juxtapose the communal character of traditional orders with the impersonal character of modern life. Giddens emphasizes the "disimbedding" of social systems that occurs as a result of modernization and the subsequent need for reimbedding, which often occurs in the idiom of nationalist, ethnic or cultural identity (1990). Hobsbawm and Ranger argue that invented traditions arise as attempts to structure some parts of the world as invariant and unchanging in the face of the constant change and innovation of the modern world (1983). And Gellner suggests that industrialization, modularization and specialization of production and "hunger for industrial affluence"(1983, 101) encouraged people to formulate the nationalist ideal. (See also Hutchinson 1987, Breuilly 1993, Woolf 1996).

While anthropologists dabble in modernist analyses, particularly the sort which argue that essentialist notions of group identity are not an extension of modernizing forces but a *reaction* to them (see Herzfeld, Jaffe and Comaroff examples above), strict "modernism" has been heavily criticized by anthropologists for relying on an overly bounded and homogenized understanding of "modernity," which it is argued, reinstantiates the very form of knowledge production that is the *source* of misguided essentialisms in the first place. (Knauft 2002, Foster 2002, Spitulnik 2002, Kelly 2002, Chatterjee 1993, Appaduari 1996).[xl] As Knauft puts it, the anthropological project is to challenge "theorists who champion a homogeneous view of modernity" because they "reproduced the self-justified excesses of modernization theories that burgeoned during

the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s—that is, the idea that the developments in the modern Western world are destined for unaltered export to other areas" (17).

Interestingly (and not un-problematically), Benedict Anderson's argument in *Imagined Communities* typically escapes this line of criticism. As Smith (1998) suggests, anthropologists tend to focus more on the "imagined" element of Anderson's theory, and less on the modernist basis that allows such imagining to take place, which is Anderson's real project (136-142).

Anderson, like other modernist scholars, identifies a unified set of circumstances that arose with modernity making it possible to "think the nation"(1983, 22): the explosion of print capitalism, and the decline of sacred hierarchies and shifts in conception of time and space which, he argues, led to a "fundamental change…in modes of apprehending the world"(22). However, anthropologists often pay little attention to Anderson's theory about modernity and highlight his claim that nations are "cultural artifacts of a particular kind…imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"(1983, 4-6), as the basis for deconstructing essentialist notions of the nation, showing that they are *not* limited or sovereign and therefore are ideologically rather than empirically based.

Corsica

The late-20th-century mandate in anthropological theory to *reject* unified and centralized theories in order to avoid a legacy of hegemonic knowledge production has largely determined the anthropological focus, both analytic and ethnographic, that characterizes the bulk of current anthropological literature on native essentialist claims.

As we have seen, the logical basis for this anti-essentialism is, as Barth famously revealed, that when we look on the ground, the homogeneity, unity and regularities that

these claims uphold are simply not present. As Herbert puts it, the cultural essence proclaimed, "is not commensurate with observed data" (1991,14). The fact that natives' essentialist claims are not commensurate with empirical data has been the logical grounds for understanding these claims to be ideological and positing constructivism of some sort. It is in light of this theoretical premise that the Corsican case presents us with an interesting problem.

Corsican militants, like Handler's Québécois and Herzfeld's Greeks, are passionately convinced of a true or authentic "essence" of the Corsican identity and tradition. However, those I studied did *not* hold that it is the invariance of their language, tradition, and heritage that grounds these claims as "true." On the contrary, as we will see in the following chapters, these Corsican cultural militants, like anthropologists, *reject* homogeneous and unified renderings of Corsican culture and essence, which the past 30 years of riacquistu activism have produced. From this point of view, we do not find ourselves faced with the intellectual red herring that Linnekin suggests indigenous groups impassioned by such beliefs present. However, we find ourselves at odds with the Corsicans in a different sense. Unlike anthropologists, these cultural militants' rejection of overly homogenous and fixed cultural renderings does *not* lead them to constructivist and anti-essentialist arguments. Rather, they hold that equating the "invariant" with the "essential" masks the "true" essence they hope to reveal.

In the next chapters, I will give ethnographic examples from Corsica in which we are presented with an understanding of cultural essence and authenticity that is not based in the Enlightenment universalism that anthropologists have come to expect from movements of this sort. We will consider the kind of "essence" that Corsicans seem to be

invoking, which lies outside the anthropological critique of essentialism, and presents us with an understanding of what Corsican militants are up to that lies outside the framework that has dominated contemporary anthropological scholarship.

[xxxiii] See Brightman (1995) for an overview of these distinctions.

[xxxiv] Boas famously argued that anthropologist must uncovering natives' own groupings, arguing in 1943

> We know what we mean by the terms family, state, government, etc. As soon as we overstep the limits of one culture we do not know in how far these may correspond to equivalent concepts. If we choose to apply our classification to alien cultures we may combine forms that do not belong together. The very rigidity of definition may lead to a misunderstanding of the essential problems involved…If it is our serious purpose to understand the thoughts of a people the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours. (311)

[xxxv] See Vermeulen and Gover's edited volume (2002) *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,* for an extensive consideration of this literature's debt to Barth's premise.

[xxxvi] The "primordialist" school of thought regards the nation or ethnic group as an objective, immemorial community rooted in a long history of shared language, culture and kinship. As Geertz puts it, a nation "stems from the 'givens' or…immediate continuity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering coerciveness in and of themselves"(1973, 259).

[xxxvii] It is important to note that while Foucault's arguments about the modern episteme are particularly concerned with the discursive formations coming out of the Enlightenment, his original formulation of this concept holds that all societies are under the influence of ideological constructions of some sort (1966).

[xxxviii] This argument resonates with Hutchinson's idea of "cultural nationalism" as opposed to "political nationalism" (1987) and Chatterjee's distinction between the "community" and the" State" (1993).

[xxxix] Anthropological arguments which foreground the imagined, invented or constructed nature of the "essential" suggest that because they are constructions does *not* mean they are fabrications or false (Handler, 1984, Linnekin 1984, Linnekin 1983). It is generally held that while a group's claimed "essence" doesn't reveal something eternally or inherently true about them, it does indicate something *real*. As Linnekin argues, such claims "are symbolically constructed in the present and reflect contemporary concerns and purposes"(1991, 446).

[xl] It is important to note that modernist accounts of national, ethnic and cultural essentialisms are generally not ethnographic, and are not typically written by anthropologists. Consider Anderson 1983, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Giddens 1990, Hutchinson 1987, Chatterjee 1993.

Chapter V
The Corsican *Versu*
Cultural Essence and the Emergent Present

During my first phase of fieldwork on Corsica, it seemed likely that the claims I was constantly hearing about the vrai tradition and authentic Corsican culture and language, fit into the explanatory model in anthropology, which understands these claims to be constructions. It has been one of contemporary anthropology's main projects to reveal ways in which Western Rationalism and universalism, when applied to notions of Culture and group identity, have often led to prescriptive ideologies. As discussed in the last chapter, with this dangerous possibility in mind, recent anthropological scholarship on nationalist, ethnic, and revitalization movements has aimed to show the ways in which essentialized ideals of time, space, culture and identity are often employed by local activist groups as "proof" of cultural authenticity, strategically enforcing constructed ideas about cultural purity.

However, as I began talking to Corsican militants, something quite different revealed itself. Rather than ideals of purity, homogeneity and an immemorial past, my conversations with militants were dominated by markedly different notions about Corsican essence and authenticity: notions of spontaneity, notions of particular, non-replicable moments—what we might call the fleeting or momentary character of the real. My informants were preoccupied with the ways in which the vrai tradition bears witness to the particular and unique instances of time and space that cultural phenomena (whether song, traditional cheese, language etc.) emerge.

It turns out that, like anthropologists, many Corsican militants are themselves disillusioned by the homogenized identity discourse they themselves have created over

the past few decades. Despite the substantial advances in the recognition and valorization of Corsican culture (see chapter III), many militants feel that the frames invoked to articulate Corsican identity (books, CDs, museum exhibits, magazine articles, radio programs, etc.) are actually problematic. As a result of these lenses, they believe the understanding of what Corsican culture truly is has become *too* homogenous, *too* standardized, *too* fixed. Something vital has been lost in translation.

In what we could call a second wave of cultural activism, though perpetuated by many of the same actors, today many cultural militants argue, as one informant put it, "the culture has been corrupted…in the riacquistu, we lost everything by trying to reacquire ourselves." Another told me sadly, "In twenty-five years, it [the real tradition] will be gone. The irony is that before the riacquistu, more people lived in the tradition, in their day-to-day lives. Now, with all the efforts—the schools, the museums…people live it less in the everyday."

A new genre of militant discourse rejects in principle what is now referred to as the "*sacralisation*"(consecration), "*patrimonilisation*,"(industry of heritage), or "*réification*" (reification) of the culture, and considers all such cultural production to be a false rendering of the Truth (capital T) they are after. As Michele Guelfucci, a riacquistu activist for over 30 years, explains, "in the 1970s…the riacquistu made Corsicans rediscover their patrimoine…but for 20 some years now, the traditional polyphony has been put in danger by…the *folklorization*…the *décontextualization*…the *mis en spectacle* [putting on a show] of…these practices, the *muséeification* of the *patrimoine immaterial"*(2008,17).

In this chapter, I will describe the kind of essential cultural truth that many of today's militants feel has been compromised by their own efforts over the past few decades. I was always moved by the kind of talk about the culture described in this chapter. It came as a relief after the barrage of seemingly hollow riacquistu discourse and products discussed in Chapter III. While it took me a long time to get a handle on what these essentialist expressions were after, from the very beginning I *believed* that people were sincere and passionate about their concern. My belief in their sincerity is the kind of assessment that, in anthropology, is always difficult to defend (see Crapanzano 1986, Clifford 1983, Marcus 1980), but is often one of the most important indicators of the stakes for people on the ground. In large part, I believe I had access to these passionate beliefs because people are disappointed, discouraged, even outraged, about the state of cultural production, and they want to talk about it.

In the following interview data, I consider the comments made by a cross-section of militants. I had conversations (formal or informal interviews) with approximately 200 cultural militants during my 14 months of fieldwork, and the excerpts in this chapter are typical of the way in which a conversation about Corsican culture and identity can move from static and rote to engaged and impassioned. Almost all of the people I spoke with felt that had the riacquistu not taken place, Corsican tradition, culture and language would basically be gone today. They also, however, virtually all expressed some level of worry that these efforts have themselves corrupted the culture.

I will examine the anti-riacquistu discourse and indirect expressions of what it is people feel cultural activism has compromised. I also consider direct explanations of the vrai tradition and Corsican cultural essence, which occurred less frequently, and this is

not a coincidence, given what they are trying to express. The chapter, which engages at multiple levels of discursive activity, not only explanatory and argumentative registers, is divided into three main sections. The first looks at Corsican song, the second at artisanal production (specifically Corsican cheese), and the third at the Corsican language. These three realms have been central sites of concern for the militants, ones, that they feel are the places that *true* Corsican tradition is the most viable and the most threatened**.**

The Paghjella

The *paghjella* is arguably the most powerful and enduring cultural product of the riacquistu. It is a polyphonic song, unique to Corsica, sung by three voices. In my very first conversation about the paghjella during my pilot research on the island in 2004, when a young singer asked me whether I'd heard the paghjella, I responded "yes, polyphony…I saw it performed at a church the other night." He frowned, shook his head sternly and then said seriously, "not polyphony, that exists *par tous* (everywhere)…this is something different."

A paghjella is a profane song, traditionally a shepherd's song. Originally, a singer made up a line of 8 poetic feet based on the ordinary conditions that surrounded him—about the mountains, his goats, the day at the market. A complete paghjella is made up of three stanzas, each of 6 lines. Today, singers often repeat stanzas that they have learned from older generations. The voice that begins the paghjella, called the *secunda,* is the middle voice of the three in range, and usually it belongs to a very strong singer. It is he who gives the song shape and to whom the other two voices respond. There is a wavering of the voice, a *melisma*, that is characteristic of Corsican singing, and within the *versu* (the musical air of a particular region) individual singers add flourishes that mark the

song as their own, and distinguish themselves as singers. The singing is impassioned and sad. Even when the subject matter isn't sad, there is a longing and gravity to it.

When the secunda launches the paghjella, his voice pierces the air with a sudden and powerful solemnity. Soon after the secunda begins, the bass enters. This voice pulls the soaring secunda down, grounding it, tugging at it. Finally, and often most provocatively, the *terza* enters, the highest voice, at an odd interval with the secundo, and this voice pushes the other two voices often in tense disharmonies[xli], notes rubbing up against each other rather than meshing, creating swells of tension followed by relieving resolution. Each voice follows its own melody, and the song as a whole is marked by the three different paths moving in and out of tension.

Today, paghjellas, or songs sung in three part polyphonic harmonies that mimic traditional paghjella singing, have become central to the performative repertoire revived by Canta U Populu Corsu in the 1970s, and adopted the hundreds of touring groups today. On one occasion, when I went to visit Jean-Pierre, a passionate singer of the paghjella, at the video store where he worked, he was sitting at a computer looking at an online list of Corsican singing groups. I sat down and pointed to one,

"Do you like them?" I asked. He shrugged. "He's my Corsican teacher," I said pointing to Christian Santucci's name.

He looked at where I was pointing, "Oh, Santucci…" he said and rolled his eyes. I laughed.

"I'm telling you," he said shaking his head critically, "Santucci, he's a professor, he sings…he has the will [meaning activist inclination]; it's good that there are some like that," he paused and continued, "because you know that there are*, many, many* like

that…have you seen the list of the groups there are?" He pulled the list up on his computer, and scrolled down and down, rolling his eyes again, "there are more, and more, and *more,* you see?" he said scrolling through. "If you want one, there certainly are…more, and more and more, bon…But then," he turned away from the screen, "But, then, in the quality, the voice, the manner of…of…I would say, culturally, we're losing, losing, losing…"

Like Jean-Pierre, most of the passionate singers I interviewed insisted that the "real" paghjella is not what you see in concerts performed by these groups, in which 6-8 singers, typically dressed in the same color clothing (often black), stand in a straight line across the stage facing out towards the audience, each at a microphone. The groups sing a medley of resistance songs and traditional songs, accompanied by a guitar and often a bass and drums. Their repertoire is memorized and practiced. I was told again and again that the paghjella is not a performance, that pitch pipes are a sign of falsity, as are lyric sheets and performative, self-conscious energy. Even putting traditional songs on CDs is often looked down upon by many of today's militants. If singers are part of a professional singing group, as many, like Jean-Pierre are, recording can be a source of great anxiety and tension for them. Virtually all of the militant singers I interviewed contrasted singing in the vrai tradition with the "show-biz" that has exploded over the past 30 years on the island.

In contrast to this performative sphere, paghjellas that are approved of by today's cultural militants (more or less) occur at informal gatherings—picnics (*merendellas*), village fetes, at the counters of bars, etc.. Unlike the polyphonic music heard in concerts, often in the quiet sanctuary of old churches or one of several new cultural centers built

with money raised through efforts for cultural revitalization, when the secunda launches the paghjella in a "vrai" paghjella, his voice rises above the noise of the chatting crowd and pierces the festive air.

It is common, on entering a bar, to see a group of men gathered at one end, drinking whiskey or *pastis,* the strong anise-flavored liquor popular among Corsican men, and singing a paghjella. Considered even *more* "in the tradition" than these ordinary group gatherings, however, are a set of spring and summer "pilgrimages," when impassioned militants trek hours into the mountains (often to a chapel or abandoned village) to encounter the vrai, vrai tradition. It was in April that I attended my first "pilgrimage" with Anto and his wife Pauline.

Anto

Anto is not a big man, but he is thick in stature, sometimes it seems from muscle and sometimes from age. He's in his late 50s now and has closely cropped white hair. His face, however, if you catch him at the right moment, is that of a teenage boy. He smiles and winks and cajoles. And then sometimes a temper swells in him and he becomes very serious. He is a passionate singer of the Corsican paghjella and other monodic songs of the Corsican tradition.

On the day I accompanied Anto and his wife on our first pilgrimage to the abandoned village to commemorate the life of the shepherd who had lived out his days there alone, the line of people from the surrounding villages trudged one after another through deep valleys with occasional glimpses of the Mediterranean. The path came in and out of view. Sometimes we wished we'd had machetes, other times we found ourselves on a path of uneven stones packed tight, remnants from the ancient routes that

had allowed donkeys and men to get from village to village. We passed cows, goats, a drift of wild pigs sleeping. And as we got closer to our destination, tired and hot, we began to hear sounds of life and smell a fire. We rounded a bend and heard Anto yell "eh oh!" and was answered in turn by an "eh oh!"

"There it is," he said, and pointed excitedly through an opening in some trees. I followed him through the ruins of the village: hollow stone houses, walls marking the boundaries of people's land, old terrace farms. As we got closer, Anto gained speed and by the time we descended into what years before was probably the main square of the village, he had distanced himself from us completely. He walked straight over to a group of about 15 men (the youngest was 12, the oldest probably 75) who were sitting in a line on a wall of one of the crumbling houses, as the men do in all village squares. The men were laughing and joking. Anto seemed overjoyed to see them, though they are friends of his whom he sees all the time. To reunite in this space, he told us, was a special occasion. He immediately took a cup of *pastis*, and sat down with them.

There was one old house, slightly more intact than the others, in what had been the village square, where food was being prepared. There was no electricity or running water. There was a true Corsican hearth, the famous "*furgorne*," and it was lit—Corsican charcuterie hung from the ceiling to be smoked; women were deep frying chestnut flour in cast iron pans, making beignets, over the open fire. The crisp balls were filled with brocciu from the milk of the young shepherd's flock. Anto's wife turned to me and said, "Now, this, *this* is the real tradition…"

Then the singing started. The line of men sitting on the wall spiraled in towards each other and began to sing a paghjella. The physical dimensions of paghjella singing

are fundamental to the song: at least 3 men standing close in a ring, often leaning an elbow or hand on another's shoulder, and most characteristically holding their hands to their ears to better hear themselves sing. There can be a powerful intimacy in these singing rings. The men sing in full voice, the louder, the more forceful, the better. The quality of the song and the experience of the song for the singers depend profoundly on their attention to one another. The swells, tensions, and releases are only attainable with the utmost focus on what one another are doing.

Jean-Pierre once told me, "You have to watch to know what he's going to do. Your sight is quicker than your hearing, and you have to anticipate, so you have to watch everything he does," I was always captivated by the searching eyes of Corsican men in these circles of song. In a culture where eye contact is often avoided, where a man's prowess is often marked by the control he asserts over whom he "sees" and "doesn't see," it is remarkable to watch a group of strong men focus attention on their neighboring singers. They look intently into each other's eyes, watch each other's mouths for hints of what is coming, lean in closer to feel the vibrations and movement of the music.

Anto is totally devoted to the tradition. He, like so many of the militants I encountered, is dismissive of riacquistu efforts and sees most of the cultural revival to be artificial and misguided. This is why Anto doesn't like to sing when people ask him to. He believes in a total spontaneity, a singing that arises not in constructed situations but in "real" or "ordinary" life. He cherishes singing situations that unfold from the urge to sing, and he cherishes the urge itself. And then "we sing just to sing. It doesn't matter how 'good' it is," he tells me. The chants, for him, are not a matter of being "good" in a conventional sense—with the right notes, harmonies, etc. This is, in fact, explicitly *not*

what they're about. People face each other to sing, they do not face out toward an audience. It is a living, present experience, not one that is reproduced or intentionally memorized or read from a book. The melodic airs may be repeated, but each entry into song is an unknown, and if it is otherwise, then the spirit has been compromised. As ethnomusicologist, Caroline Bithell (2007), puts it, "the emphasis placed on the process of constructing a paghjella anew on the occasion of each rendition, as opposed to simply reproducing a song…is reflected in the way in which singers speak in terms of 'making' or 'creating' a paghjella (*fà una paghjella*) as opposed to 'singing' a paghjella (*canta una paghjella*)"(63). The particularities of a given singing circle (whether climactic harmonies or muddled disharmonies) are cherished. As one of my village neighbors who is a singer told me, "the paghjella is great, not because it is *beau* but because it is *vrai*."[xlii] *Vrai* means true in French. The common phrase, "*c'est vrai"* means, simply, it's true. Vrai can also be translated as "authentic," "genuine," "real," or "veritable".

What is at stake for paghjella singers devoted to the *vrai tradition* is linked to Benjamin's discussion of the "authenticity" of art. "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art," Benjamin argues, "is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be…" (220). When Anto feels the pulse of his emergent being and reality as a paghjella writes itself in the world, and hangs in the conditional space of not knowing exactly what note is coming next, he is encountering Benjamin's authenticity—the song emerging in a specific, unreplicable time and space. What he is drawn to is, in a sense, the music's "unique existence at the place where it happens to be…" (220). It is this kind of "presence" that Anto and Jean-Pierre

feel when they participate in a paghjella singing session considered to be in the spirit of the vrai tradition.

The particular kind of intensity and presence that exists between the singers in Corsican paghjella was made very clear to me by an inverse example, when a Corsican singer invited me to see a group of American singers who had come to Corsica to learn polyphonic singing and, after they had rehearsed for 15 days, to perform in a local church accompanied by a Corsican group. The American singers were talented, trained singers. I watched as one of the American singers sang secunda with two Corsicans singing bass and terza. The difference in the American's body language was astounding. He held his hand to his ear, and stood in the close circle, and attended very closely to the others voices, but where their glances towards one another searched to anticipate the music, the American's regard was almost too personal. I could see him looking at the other two singers for affirmation, at times laughing with his eyes at something he'd done with his line of singing, trying to communicate with them through his regard and even through his body language. He would lean into their space farther than they do into each other's, and in a way that invaded the sphere. At that moment I realized that the powerful kind of intimacy that emanates from the threesomes of paghjella singers is not a celebration of their personal relationships or individual personalities. They are not looking at each other in reflection but beyond each other to what each person is producing, and how that production is pushing the space between them in one direction or another, and in turn letting their own voices counter that push. The circle of singing is not a confirmation of something that already exists, but a living construction of a relationship in which all three singers have to participate, forgetting the past or the future and listening to what is

happening at that moment in order to survive it and push forward to the next.[xliii] Even though the American singer's notes were right, and the literal physical dimensions of the song (hand to ear, close three-person ring) were more or less present, the sphere of tension in which the paghjella takes form could not mount itself, and the song fell flat.

This was also clear to me when I traveled with a group of Corsican singers to a polyphonic festival in Sardinia. In one evening's concert, the Corsican and Sardinian groups alternated performances. The Sardinians were dressed in traditional garb and 12 singers stood in a large open semi-circle facing the audience. One of the singers led the group, took out a pitch pipe, sang the note and then conducted the group in powerful synchrony. It was beautiful. When it was time for the Corsicans to sing, four men got onto stage dressed in street clothes[xliv]. They stood in a circle facing each other, backs to the audience. When they were ready, one voice pierced the air, and the paghjella was off and running. Unlike the Sardinian's songs, which felt full, polished, and satisfying, when the Corsicans sang, I hung on every note, watching as the singers sought out the next moment in the eyes and bodies of their fellow singers. When the songs soared they brought the audience outside the limits of the room. When the singers lost each other, it felt like the train might wreck.[xlv]

Marie-Cécile

Marie-Cécile, in her late 40s, is a self-proclaimed Nationalist and cultural militant, and a particularly articulate informant. She is passionate (if discouraged) about her cause. She teaches a Corsican music group the traditional song. She tells me that she herself will leave a trace, an important one, for future generations. She says sarcastically, but not without concern, "They may have to dig beneath the creation of 'Corsican

culture' to find the gems, the authenticity, the roots that I have begun to discover in my lifetime." She jokes that the future generations will have to sift through all the fake Corsican identities created by the riacquistu in order to find the real. They will not only have to dig into the past but will always be in danger of being tricked by masqueraders.

Marie-Cécile spoke to me openly about her dissatisfaction with the riacquistu. "The university has failed itself. I think the people who died to bring it to Corsica would be disappointed. It's too 'academic' too 'theoretical,' and it shouldn't be. They produce a lot of colloquiums, but there is no link to the *real."* She is frustrated with the professors at the university, "Now the professors are no longer militant…they no longer inspire their students to think about their cultural identity, to fight for its recognition. It has become just more of the same, and it's contributing to the death of a people rather than fighting for our existence…"[xlvi]

She thinks that the riacquistu uncovered the tip of the iceberg. "During the early years, we discovered all kinds of things that had never been really investigated about our history, our culture, ourselves—religious rites, mystical and medicinal beliefs, traditional savoir-faire, immaterial expression through song…But, as soon as it began, it started to be corrupted. The same people who fought for the university were content to…well, they standardized the culture…this corrupted the very forms that they were uncovering. The traditions are totally bound to the space (*le lieu*), to the time (*le temps*), to the specificity of the land (*la spécificité du terrain*). By standardizing them, they made the traditions something consumable apart from the space or time, apart from the specific. And, in this process the transmission became corrupted."

In specific, she talks to me about the standardization of Corsican traditional song. "Now they're teaching it in schools where the idea of learning a 'chant' is to learn a melody. But this isn't right; it loses the whole social, spatial, spiritual experience of 'chant.' This is getting lost, and, what's worse, people think that they've saved it…"

She bows her head a bit and then looks up at me seriously, "It's not about singing a melody. Learning a chant is not about learning a melody, it's about learning a way of being—living it, in those situations in which it is passed, the right acoustics, the right people, the right moment. You can't create these. You can't construct them. It's about having an experience."

She continues, "the *lieu de transmission* [space of transmission] is sacred, and this is being violated. Back in the day, it was dangerous to learn outside of the context in which the ritual was really taking place, it was only viable to *learn in this moment.* It's in the loss of this kind of space of transmission that the immaterial culture is in danger of really being lost—a certain kind of intimacy…"

As militant singer Jean-François Acquaviva put it, when interviewed by Bithell (2007), people who have been trained in Western music[xlvii] try to "deconstruct the line, [of song] trying to work out what [the singer] has done," misunderstanding what the singing is all about. "You have to put the pen and paper aside," he says. Acquaviva described why it was hard for him to teach paghjella singing in a classroom setting. "You never do the same thing! ...That's the very thing you have to learn…you have to learn not to learn that things are fixed. You have to learn more *a way of singing* than a song" (my emphasis, 68).

First, we should note that Marie-Cécile's critique of the university professors is that "they produce a lot of colloquiums, but there is no link to the *real."* And, her worry for future generations, is that they will mistake masqueraders of the tradition for the "real." Ultimately, what she is concerned with is a cultural reality that she feels has been increasingly hidden by riacquistu cultural production. In the 1960s and 70s, cultural militants interested in preserving the song came back to the Corsican villages of the interior and recorded the songs, wrote down the lyrics, and put these cultural products into museums, song books, singing schools, etc. Today, there are hundreds of groups who sing parts of the traditional repertoire. But Marie-Cécile argues that this approach to "saving" the culture is highly problematic because what Corsican song "really is" is not to be found in its melody or lyrics, which have been extracted from real singing situations and written down, standardized. She's not suggesting that the melody and lyrics are unimportant, but rather, that they cannot capture the essence of these songs—what they *really* are—which can never be "something consumable apart from the space or time, apart from the specific." "The traditions," rather than being static and unchanging, she argues, "are totally bound to space, to time, to the specificity of the land."

Marie-Cécile is interested in the *specific,* the actual instants and conditions of a singing session as they emerge in real time ("the right acoustics, the right people, the right moment"), and the way in which an encounter with the conditionality of time and space brings a certain and profound character of reality to the surface. It is important to note, and this will be an ongoing theme, that the specificity of time and space that Marie-Cécile argues is essential for "authentic" song, is *no less* true of a concert in which singers perform melodies they have learned in singing school, or the overly performative

singing Anto critiques. Of course, in a concert where the musicians have practiced and planned what to sing, anything could still happen as the performance unrolls. Any number of musical combinations could manifest. But in a paghjella singing session, the encounter with this contingency is arguably more powerful because it is somehow the point.

For many of today's militants, standardizing what Corsicans think the traditional "chant" is, focusing on its melodies and words rather than learning the song through moments of real emergence, has hidden this essential character of it. And, Marie-Cécile argues that this has happened with riacquistu activism at large. By packaging Corsican culture, in colloquium, in the university, in singing schools, people are being taught to conceive of cultural *essence* as something that one could articulate piece by piece, like the notes of a melody, and render in books, articles, museums, etc.; or prove in an argument with evidence. Marie-Cécile believes that this has falsified Corsican culture—not because the pieces don't have some validity, but because there is a *reality* of culture that cannot be captured by standardized descriptions or analytic proofs, because the cherished character of this reality is undetermined until the notes hit the air.

When I happened upon a paghjella singing session in San Petrone's church, one of the singers, Lurenzu, explained to me that often now paghjella singing turns into a "spectacle." "*C'est la vie, hé*?" he laughed lightly. "But not for us," he said, referring to his nephew and cousin huddled in the back corner of the damp and empty church on that early spring evening. "For us, it's not a spectacle, it's friends, it's soul…some people use a pitch pipe, but us, never." When I asked him about the riacquistu, he told me, "It was important because otherwise we wouldn't be able to sing, like this…but it is something

past. Today, we are like…you know the aborigines of Australia…[he laughs]; no really, we are the last of a people.…In 25 years, it is going to be gone. The irony is that before the riacquistu, more people lived in the tradition in their everyday lives. Now, with all the efforts--the schools, the museums…people live it less in the everyday."

Rinatu Coti

When I went to interview Rinatu Coti, one of the founders of the riacquistu, we spoke in a small basement office in the port city of Ajaccio. We began the interview by talking about the riacquistu, a word that Coti coined in the summer of 1974. Not long into our discussion, the conversation turned to "polyphony" and the "paghjella."

"Truly, polyphony it is our *manière d'être* [manner of being]," Coti told me, and then he translated it into Corsican, "our *ghjè u versu*..." This led to a conversation about the concept *versu,* its relationship to the paghjella, and the Corsican "manner of being."

I was familiar with the Corsican word "versu," which had been described to me as the musical "air" of a region—the different melodies, elaborations and ways of pronouncing words, which allowed a singer to be identified by his village and pieve. But Rinatu Coti's description was more revealing. "Our ghjè u versu," he began,

> it both means the *parole*, what is articulated, but it also means the movement of the parole, that is to say, all that the body is able to keep within: the breath, the movement, the rhythm….and all that inscribes itself at the same time in space and in time…Because polyphony does do that, you know, it comes into being in a given place that corresponds to a given moment… it is like *a stonda, una stonda*...a stonda is something that that lasts a time, one does not see it begin, just as one does not know when it will finish. It is a lapse of time that inscribes itself in a movement, in a particular place. And the paghjella also, at its base, is also this, it is at the moment where there is this junction between space and time.

He went on to comment on the way in which the versu is often misrepresented:

> We misunderstand because since music started to be written, we see the music written as a form, so we have an image…we see the movement of the music in

> written form, the singer *knows* what he is going to sing. … This movement the singer sees on paper, it is that which for many today corresponds to *u so versu,* that's to say, to the *manner of singing* for example in Castiglione we call it *u versu di Castiglione. ...* But, here on Corsica, *u versu* is not really that… I mean, *u versu* has an entire vocabulary surrounding it in the Corsican language. For example, about something that is in disorder, even text, for example, we say *avvirsetelu!***,** that means 'give it its movement, give it its form!' This has a poetic will in the background, because it is poetic…it is therefore to make, to make something and something that is not *ordained,* something that is a bit shapeless, a bit chaotic, erratic, like the rocks…From there, is born something that only the *volonté de l'être* [will to be] is capable of producing.

Rinatu Coti's discussion of the paghjella as the Corsican "manner of being" suggests that this "Corsicanness" has to do with a confluence of time and space, the emergence of a period of time that is inscribed in a particular place with particular movement, what he calls *una stonda*. He emphasizes, however, that the notion of time and space he invokes is *undetermined,* in so far as one does not know when it will begin or end, or what it will consist of, for that matter. For Coti, this "essence" at the heart of the polyphonic tradition, and arguably the Corsican sense of authentic identity itself, is elusive because what is so important and valued about it *is* its inherent undeterminedness.[xlviii]

This is why Rinatu goes on to say, "this volonté de l'être, u versu*,* is something that is in itself truly inaccessible…by 'inaccessible,' I don't mean the ordinary meaning of 'access,' as though there is a road to drive to get to u versu but we can't find it...No, when we talk about u versu as something inaccessible, what we are talking about is an 'access' that one can never get to…it signifies *outside* of reach. Really, the inaccessible."

Coti's analysis resonates with the expressions that Bithell reports in her interviews with Corsican singers' descriptions of polyphonic singing, "Polyphony is intoxicating. It's a perpetual search for an equilibrium that you never attain"(2007, 75).

Or as another says, “This for me was a bodily thing…something automatic, something …beyond the intellect (69). Or for another, “Because music…is part of the intimate architecture of the world…when you have the privilege of practicing it, you feel like…someone who not only partakes in this creation but…participates *in* this creation….”(73).

Marie-Cécile, Rinatu Coti and many other militants like them deeply value the experience of hanging in the conditionality of their own realities, reveling in the undetermined character of time and space, watching as a song writes itself in the world, entirely dependent on the specifics of the situation—the weather that day, the acoustics of the place, the people involved, the concentration of the singers at any given moment, etc. This experience, what Acquaviva called a “way of singing,” and what Marie-Cécile called a “way of being,” and Rinatu Coti calls the “ghjè u versu” is *both* one of intimacy and presence and one in which the incertitude of what comes next is palpable. In fact, it is the joint concentration *on* and recognition *of* the incertitude itself that brings people powerfully into the present. It is felt that the frames produced by the riacquistu have made encounters with this “authentic” less and less possible, putting people at a distance from the “truth” their culture has to offer.

Authentic Products: Cheese

In all of my interviews with Corsican militants, the paghjella and Corsican music came up most frequently as an example of the vrai tradition. It is not that everyone involved in cultural revitalization is a singer, but many point to traditional singing as an example of the vrai tradition. I believe that this is because music is itself a good example of what they are trying to indicate. In other words, it is not difficult to understand the

profound difference between the codification of song in notes and words on a page and the emergent reality of a song in any given instance. However, while it may be easier to conceive of this distinction when the cultural phenomenon in question obviously unfolds in time, the kind of authenticity or reality at stake for Corsicans was expressed to me in terms of "authentic" cultural objects as well.

During the spring of 2008, I accompanied Stephanie, a young Continental woman who worked for *Casgiu Casanu,* an association formed in 1988, aimed to support shepherds of the "tradition," on her visits to the shepherds across the island.

There are a total of 700 shepherds on Corsica, and 300 of them, called *fermiers,* continue to produce their own milk and cheese, using traditional methods. Most still practice a modified form of transhumance in which they bring their flock of animals to the high mountains during the summer months. Traditionally, the shepherd would have stayed with his flock and continued to milk them in the mountains. One often comes across stone huts (*bergeries*) in the highest mountains. Today, however, the majority of fermiers leave their animals in the mountains and check on them every week or two weeks, taking the summer months off for themselves.

Casgiu Casanu valorizes the fermiers, describing their product in this way: "the perfumed plants of the maquis and the great manual skill and experience of each shepherd confer on their cheese a bouquet and personality directly linked to the territory"(Casgiu Casanu brochure, 2008). Despite the value Casgiu Casanu places on the tradition, Stephanie's official role was to help the traditional shepherds standardize their production to attain a "statute of sanitation" that would allow them to sell their product in stores and export it. As it stands, only 17 of the 300 fermiers have this statute.

The majority of them only sell their cheese locally to their village and the surrounding villages, as they have for centuries. In both of the villages where we lived, people bought cheese from their local shepherd and always insisted that it was the best cheese on Corsica.

Stephanie told me that she has many worries about the continuation of traditional cheese production. She argued that the lack of "transmission" of savoir-faire is a big problem. Those who follow in their parents' footsteps, who were raised and "*se baigner en dedans"* (bathed within the tradition), she told me, do fairly well. But, these family businesses are in the minority. Others who try to start a traditional enterprise from scratch and have *no* "savoir-faire," she argues, need the proper "formation". Casgiu Casanu, with funding from the Collectivité Territoriale, has organized "*stages"* (professional training sessions) to teach shepherds about effectively raising their herd (*élevage*)—how to best nourish their goats or sheep on the local maquis, etc.—and about the production of cheese—the importance of maintaining a constant temperature as the cheese sets, sanitizing the environment, etc. These *stages* have been markedly unsuccessful. They are required in order for a shepherd to attain the statute of sanitation, but most shepherds find them useless and even insulting.

In one interview, when I asked a middle-aged, long-time shepherd of the tradition named Marcel about the training for *bergers*, he lifted his eyes, smiled ironically, and lowered them again and laughed. "You do not decide to be a berger one day and become one the next. It takes experience, *it takes life*. You have to watch, you have to know your animals." I asked him to give me an example. "You have to know if they are pregnant, how they carry their young, what they look like when they're sick… there are

tons of things, you can't know without living with them. It's different for each animal. It's the same with the cheese making class. You learn technical terms, but you don't learn anything about what it *takes* to make cheese." He said despondently, "These courses are now requirements, you must fulfill them to be a berger—eleveur [breeder] and *fromagére*, but you learn nothing from them. You don't need school, you have to do it in practice, every day, every day…"

And this was a common sentiment. I was told often that it wasn't a matter of schooling. To be a shepherd one must have "*l'oeil*" (an eye). Less than half of the 300 fermieres are members of Casgiu Casanu (it is not obligatory). And those who are, Stephanie told me, do it primarily because she has the power to sign a form that confirms that they've done the appropriate training to get minimal subsidies from the state for their enterprise (approximately 15 Euros per animal per year). Stephanie tried to organize a *réseau* of replacement workers so that if shepherds, who often work independently or with only one partner, were sick or needed to go to a class, someone else could milk the animals. This effort also failed. People refused to unionize. Stephanie also is trying to create a bank of knowledge so that if a young shepherd has a problem—with his cheese, with his flock—he will have a resource to consult, so that a little problem is less likely to become a "*catastrophe*." But, this too, the shepherds resist. The knowledge traditional shepherds have about their animals is, to a large extent, conceived of as non-generalizable, non-reproducible, non-transferable. One doesn't know "goats" in general, but one's *own* goats. The relationship to their knowledge about their trade—their animals, cheese production, and local terrain—much like the non-dit of Chapter II, has an utterly personal quality.

After my tour of shepherds with Stephanie, I went back to visit a few on my own for more extended conversations. On one visit, to a shepherd named Etienne, I brought Jackson and David with me, thinking Jackson would like to see the goats. To get to Etienne's bergerie, we drove an hour into the mountains from the west coast of Corsica. The road, like so many Corsican roads, wound back and forth and back and forth endlessly. Eventually, off in the distance, to my great relief, we saw a clump of houses, a village. Finally, the road got narrower and narrower, ultimately slipping between the stone houses of the village. On the narrow sidewalks, old women and men sat on folding chairs, eyeing us as we inched past. As we came around the backside of the church at the end of the village, we were faced with the end of the road. "What now?" asked David. I remembered vividly from my trip with Stephanie. I smiled and pointed off the edge of the road to where there was a steep slope with a small strip of broken concrete, barely wide enough for a vehicle.

When we reached Etienne's hut, wondering if we would ever make it back up the hill, I got out of the car and waved to him. He came over to greet us. Apologizing for being sweaty he shook our hands, and Jackson insisted on a shake too. We headed into his hut, which was constructed out of odds and ends, where he and his father pass the days while their goats roam the mountains that surround the village. It had no electricity. But, despite the ramshackle look of the outside, the inside was organized, even tidy. Etienne served us warm juice boxes and took out a cookie for Jackson. We made small talk for a while, and then Jackson and David left to look around, and I started to ask Etienne questions.

Etienne is a young and lively man of about 30. He told me that he loves his work, though it is hard. He works everyday from 4:30am until 8 or 9pm, but he says "it's a passion… a passion for the animals and for the land…that's what keeps me going." He says this with a sadness or some kind of calmness in his eyes and voice that makes me think this is not the whole story, and that I will not get the whole story. Stephanie later told me that Etienne is worried that the land that his bergerie is on, which he rents from an old friend of his father's, will be reclaimed by the friend's son, when he inherits it.

He built this bergerie years ago with his father, a lifetime shepherd, who is now in his seventies. Etienne's father has taught him everything he knows and helps as much as he can with the goats, but he's old and Etienne doesn't fool himself. "He won't be here forever, and then I don't know what I'm going to do."

Most traditional shepherds prefer *le chèvres* (goats) to *les brebis* (sheep). "They are more intelligent animals," I was told again and again by different shepherds I talked to. Etienne insisted that, "Goats have personalities. They are more difficult; they don't always listen; they have their own plans, but they are more affectionate and more interesting." I thought about Jackson and smiled. "The brebie just follow," he continued. "They're *bête*." As he was telling me this, a goat, who was the first of the herd to come trampling down from the mountains that loomed behind us, ran into the shack where we were sipping juice boxes, bleated and bleated, kind of teasing us and then ran out before Etienne could catch him.

Etienne laughed and quickly closed the door. "They try to get inside to get bread." He smiled as he bolted the door, and then he opened the window. He took pieces of stale bread from a bag and threw them out the window for the goats. They nudged

each other and came nosing forward, each to get a piece. He called each affectionately by name, telling me about their various personalities (there were about 140). We walked outside, and I asked him if he had a favorite. "*Bah oui*! This one…" He leaned down to a female goat named Amandine, who nuzzled his cheek.

He told me that one of the hardest things about being a shepherd is the regulation that Europe is putting on cheese production for small producers of traditional cheese like himself. He makes his cheese daily in a small cave-like structure beside the shack. "For us, he said, it is expensive. It's impossible if you've just launched your business to have all the gear they require to meet the standards. And, the standards are aimed to make our cheese like industrial cheese. But, our cheese is *not* industrial cheese, and we don't want it to be. It bears no resemblance to [*rien à voir avec*] industrial cheese. The *goût*, the feel, the flavor. Eventually, one way or another, the standardization of codes will be the end of us."

Etienne mentioned *bricolage* or the verb *bricoler* many times.[xlix] This is what the traditional berger does, he told me. You solve problems in a kind of trial and error system that has evolved over centuries. In this way, the kind of knowledge that is passed from one berger to another is very specific—to the particular animals, the particular land, climate, etc. and, he told me, it is very accurate and impossible to simply document and share, as Stephanie hopes to do. "What would that even mean?" he asked defensively. You learn from experience with someone, in the land, walking the route of the animals, feeling their bodies and their cheese. And, it is this characteristic of traditional shepherding that leads to "good" cheese.

He told me that the cheese reflects, or should reflect, for example, the temperature of the day it was made. That there is *not* a constant temperature for the cheese to "set" in most traditional *caves* where cheese is made is totally impractical from an industrial point of view. If the temperature varies too much in any given day, all the cheese will go bad and will have to be thrown out. When the possibility of *jetter le fromage* (throwing out the cheese) came up with Christophe, another older shepherd I interviewed, he said, "yes, I've had to throw out batches of cheese sometimes, you find it in the maquis. But that's the way it is. Some days it's too hot, some days it's too cold..."

For Stephanie, one of Casgiu Casanu's main goals is to help traditional farmers get the most out of their milk production, which means learning how to control conditions so that their cheese production is maximized. Stephanie's biggest concern for the shepherds is that their methods are not "*reglé,*"(well-ordered) "*cadré,*"(structured) "*standardize*" (standardized). Her efforts aim to take chance out of the equation, and help shepherds produce a more consistent product and have a more lucrative business. This is what is required if the tradition is to be "saved." But for Etienne, and the other shepherds I spoke with, "chance" is central to what their product *is*. They are not interested in the consistency. It is, in fact, the *inconsistency* that allows "authentic" cheese to bear the variety of life, its particularity, change and contingency, and *that* is what yields a good "gout." Etienne told me that by eating and appreciating cheese made from the variety of animals, seasons, temperatures, etc., one is closer to the "reality of the "patrimoine… the culture, Corsica itself." [1]

A particularly vivid, valorized object of the tradition on Corsica that points to the same sort of "authenticity" in Corsican song and cheese, at stake for many Corsican

militants, is the "*pierre séche*" (dry stone) masonry of traditional Corsican houses, walls and mountain paths. The oldest pierre séche structures, the *pagliaghji, were* the traditional houses of Shepherds*,* and can be found today scattered in the high mountains.

Over the course of the 20th century, cheaper and less time-consuming methods of cement and stucco construction began to replace this ancient technique. However, the majority of houses in Corsican villages, like our apartment which was in a 700 year old house, far pre-date the 20th century, and retain their pierre séche walls. Today, the savoir-faire involved in this construction technique is threatened. In October 2008, there was a two page article in a weekend supplement in the local newspaper on the traditional stone walls of pierre séche that a group of young people had just restored, with a caption, "The wall is a piece of work undeniably in the project of the reappropriation of ancient techniques…" The article describes the man responsible for passing down the traditional architectural savoir-faire, Ange-Marie Franceschini, as "conscientious in his desire to contribute to the rehabilitation of this patrimoine, he tries hard to communicate his passion in his village, notably to the young people." (Oct 10-16). The article quotes Franceschini as saying, "Those who constructed walls in pierre séche were men of the people, men of the earth, shepherds. They had in their ordinary gestures a reflex for the stone and the environment..." (*La Corse Votre Hebdo*, Oct 10-16, Pp. 12-13)

The stones of a traditional pierre séche Corsican wall are of all different shapes and sizes, and are collected from the surrounding countryside**.** The masons attend to each stone's particular shape and size to fit it together with the others, without mortar. It would be impossible to simply pull out one of the stones from the ensemble and replace it

with another. The integrity of the wall is born out of the particular relationship between the stones that were collected, and placed by particular hands, on a particular day.

It is useful to consider, in contrast, a house made of industrially produced cinder blocks, of regulated, "identical" size, shape, etc. Each of these blocks is *no less "*authentic" than each individual stone in the pierre séche wall. The contingency of the industrial wall—that the cinder blocks were made in a particular plant, transported in a particular vehicle, cemented together in particular conditions, by a particular person, etc.---is *no less* true of the industrial wall than it is of the pierre séche wall, *but* the question that presents itself is: do the pierre séche wall, the emergent paghjella, and the non-standardized cheese, bear their particularity, reveal it, announce it, more powerfully than their counter parts do? Put differently, does the uniformization, standardization or regularization of these cultural processes and products effectively hide the contingency that went into their production?

Furthermore, when these cultural processes become regulated and standardized in rulebooks, instruction manuals or scores of music, they become, in a sense, external to the person producing them. For the traditional mason or shepherd, their modes of production are learned through apprenticeship and life experience. They don't appeal to a body of knowledge external to themselves to know how to go on because their knowledge is an extension of their life experience. Standardized cultural knowledge, on the other hand, does not depend on the particularities of life experience. It is something that can be acquired by virtually anyone willing to take the time to read the rule books, take the classes, and practice. The militants I spoke with were particularly concerned with this difference, feeling that when people engage in shepherding, cheese-making,

singing the paghjella or speaking Corsican according to rules and paradigms, these cultural activities no longer spring forth "naturally" from lived experience.

Language

Perhaps the most important (and most complicated) cultural product/process that reveals the kind of emergent contingency that Corsican militants are preoccupied with is language. Language, like the pierre séche wall, like the cheese, like a paghjella**,** is an accumulation of utterly particular influences, both as speech being uttered in any given instance, but also in its enduring structures and lexicons cobbled together over time, bearing witness to the evolving cultural, geographical, demographic realities of its speakers. Much socio-linguistic scholarship in recent years has been devoted to showing that speaking a language, like singing the paghjella, is a living, contextual exchange. Mannheim and Tedlock argue that language must be understood "as an emergent property of dialogues rather than…granted ontological priority over all speech"(1995, 1). (Gumperz 1982, Gal and Irvine 2000, Hymes 1972)

The codification of the Corsican language in grammar books, pedagogical tools, lexicons, dictionaries, etc. has been an important site at which the question of authenticity is debated among cultural militants. In her 1999 ethnography on language ideologies and politics on Corsica, Jaffe describes language activists as being divided into two camps: the "purists" and the "sociolinguists." There are, from this point of view, those who, under the influence of French language ideologies and political pressures, uphold essentialist Enlightenment visions of language in which unity and homogeneity are the marks of legitimacy. And, on the other hand, there are those influenced by a "*polynomic*" vision of language, a concept coined by Corsican, Jean-Baptist Marcellesi in the late

1980s, which has dominated Corsican academic language activism since. The polynomic vision of the Corsican language is one which is "recognized by its users in several modalities of existence; all of them are equally tolerated and they are not ranked or functionally specialized. It is accompanied by phonological and morphological intolerance between users of different varieties; moreover, lexical multiplicity is seen as a source of richness" (Jaffe quoting Marcellesi 1990, 185).

The tension between essentialist and polynomic visions of Corsican has been present in language activist efforts from day one. The French state was clear that Corsican had been excluded from the Loi Deixonne because "Corsican…was not sufficiently united or codified to count as a language"(Jaffe, 1999, 144). It was under this pressure that grammars, dictionaries, teaching materials began to be produced, in some sense as much as symbols of Corsica's legitimacy as pedagogical tools. However, even the earliest codifying efforts "took great pains to include vocabulary and speakers from different parts of the island…dramatizing…interdialectical comprehension in the fictional dialogues at the beginning of each chapter…" (Jaffe 145). A 1992 book, *Les Corse face á Leur Langue* (Corsicans Confronted with their Language), states that "Corsicans experience difficulty getting past problems of diversity…there is an underlying, and not inconsequential paradox: on the one hand, the language is only understood through the notion of unity and on the other hand, it is respect for diversity that is the chief preoccupation"(Comiti as quoted in Jaffe, 145).

On first blush the tension expressed seems to be one about reconciling ideals of unity with ideals of diversity, and this is no doubt true to a certain extent. But the framework that pits "essentialists" upholding language unity against socio-linguists

upholding language plurality, masks a persistent element of language discourse on the island that cuts across this divide, and this is a concern with the spontaneity or "naturalness" of language use being essential to the language.

Jaffe found that a large portion of her interviewees "base[d] the importance of Corsican on the attachment speakers have to the language…" and held the belief that this attachment "*this* cannot be taught"(1999, my emphasis, 176). She quotes interviewees saying, "Learning it [Corsican] in school is mechanical, not maternal. It is taught as if it were English. Corsican should be felt to be a part of the spirit, a part of life"(176), or "if they [parents] were to make a point of encouraging their children to choose Corsican as a subject [in school], it would just be a subject like any other, as useless as those who take civics say that course is…"(177).

My interviews revealed similar sentiments.

Dominique

Dominique, who is in her 40s, came to visit us in San Petrone for dinner one night with her boyfriend, a fireman in a nearby village. After dessert, we started talking about Corsican music. She told me that in high school, anyone who sang or listened to the Corsican music was said to be sympathetic to the Nationalists—the violence and the politics. She and her friends, who were "totally against the violence and nationalists, rejected the music, period. But now," she said, "I listen to the music, I read the words and I feel for it. It is my culture, and I am moved by it." But, she said, in her high school days the singers were so militant about it—"as though they were more Corsican than we were…it made me want to reject it…like, '*don't tell me who I am*!'" Now, with age, I see better what they were trying to do. I sort of understand more."

She continued, "It's like when Corsican started being taught in the schools. We hated it. *Real* Corsicans learn Corsican at home, we thought. We thought they were pushing it on us, obligating us to take this class…and we rejected it. They can't tell us who we are! Again, now with age, I wish I had learned it in school because often what's left now are just expressions. Our grandparents spoke the language, our parents spoke less, and now we have only expressions, our children will have a few words….When our grandparents were in school, they were prohibited from speaking Corsican. If they did, they would get smacked on the knuckles with a ruler. They couldn't even speak it among each other. Fifty years later, when we were in school, we were being forced to learn Corsican, because it had almost disappeared. It's ironic. But, with my son, I still sort of have that feeling of resistance, of not wanting to force him to learn Corsican, of thinking that we shouldn't *oblige* people to do it; it's not what the language is. But with time, I might regret it. I do want him to learn."

Sandrine

Sandrine, a woman in her mid-50s, grew up in Cervione, the village where the cultural association Adecec is based. She is now one of its officers. In our interview, she told me, "Our goal is to conserve the language, the patrimoine, to perpetuate it… it is important that there is this kind of work on Corsica…because I think, soon there will be no one left to testify; that's what is difficult. At first, our role was to save, you see, then it was to perpetuate, now it is to transmit to make known. Our role is there now."

She continued, "You know, there has been much, much progress…at the level of writing…literature, novels, poetry. In the past you didn't have literature written in

Corsican." She paused, and then said reflectively, "The danger here now, though, is, who are these books for? Because, who reads Corsican? We don't know."

She went on, "The older generation didn't read or write it, really very, very little. Now we have more written Corsican [she hesitates], well, sort of... It's not really so that people will actually *read* Corsican.…I mean now, if someone wants to write something for a journal in Corsican, it's fine; it's not censored, not at all, at all. But there isn't a page accorded to Corsican everyday or anything…. I really have the impression that these articles serve more like a symbol, like a warning—they put a little bit of Corsican in to remind people."

Sandrine told me that she thinks that the real danger for Corsican culture now is "*le folklore*." "It is dangerous…we must not fall into this cliché—patrimoine in order to make the patrimoine pretty, no…. It is necessary that behind it is the *ésprit identitaire*. Corsica is not France, you see, frankly…well, it's personal what I'm saying, but, we are different. We have an identity…a culture, or a mentality, and it is completely different from France."

Not unlike Etienne who expressed views about how one should learn how to shepherd, Dominique and Sandrine express the idea that the preservation of the *real* Corsican language depends on its being, in a sense, embedded in life rather than extracted from it. Formal education and articles that no one reads put the language in a realm apart from where it needs to be to thrive.

Santucci

In an interview with my young Corsican professor, Christian, and his colleague, when I tried to sensitively formulate a question about their opinions about the riacquistu

and their own role in it, Christian, cut me off, "You want to know if it worked?" "Yes." I told him. He laughed, "That we are here," he said pointing around to the office of Corsican studies at the university, "that means it has worked a little, no? In my opinion, it has worked, at least a little. They didn't do all that for nothing…at the same time, we cannot be satisfied with the situation now, it's not satisfactory…"

His colleague, also his age, added, "Is the riacquistu finished? No. It hasn't achieved its goals, so it's not finished….That's the thing, if the objectives aren't met, we can't stop. We can stop when they are fulfilled..."

Christian continued, "The riacquistu, it created a manner to sing, to engage…that generation sang in Corsican *to sing* in Corsican. It was a statement. But now, some people sing in Corsican just because they do, because they like to." His colleague nodded in agreement, "Have you heard of the Corsican rock group TrioK? For him [the main singer] he sings in Corsican, just because it is his language, not to make a statement. When I hear him singing rock music in Corsican," Christian smiles almost incredulously at the thought, "I think, for him, the riacquistu is finished. He has arrived."

Spontaneous Language Use

The feeling that the codification of the Corsican language may threaten its life force, and corrupt an "essential" feature of what the language *is* is widespread. Today many militants are driven by the desire to get the language back--out of the realm of grammar books, debates about language activism, militant manifestos, and overly intentional media productions, and into ordinary life. As Christian and his colleague express, *real* language, as they see isn't used consciously as a statement or a symbol, but "just because…". Sandrine fears that conscious promotion of the patrimoine, resulting in

its folkloric quality, is the greatest danger that language activism faces today. Beneath all these expressions is the idea that *real* language should be "felt to be a part of the spirit, a part of life" as Jaffe's interviewee put it.

The Corsican Assembly has experienced repeated failures in motions designed to make the Corsican language mandatory. In 1985, a motion for bilingualism, making the teaching of Corsican mandatory in Corsican schools, resulted in a lengthy debate in the Assembly and led to eventual impasse. The matter was tabled, and a committee was established to further study the issue. In 1989, the concept of co-officiality was launched to replace bilingualism, emphasizing the equal and non-competitive relations between French and Corsican. This too was voted down in the Assembly. The text of the decision read:

> The Corsican language is one of the principal elements constituting our culture. To set about imposing it, making it official, would run counter to the desired goal which is for an idiom which has become slightly lost and impoverished to find itself again naturally. For Corsicans, speaking it should be a pleasure and a privilege…(*Kyrn,* May 18, 1980, 13)

These failures have not, however, prevented significant gains in the institutional status and economic support of Corsican (Corsican immersion is an option for elementary school students and Corsican classes are available at all levels of education.) However, the "obligation" to learn Corsican, for the reasons expressed in the interviews excerpted in this chapter, has always posed a problem for Corsicans.

Jaffe interprets the resistance to obligatory language instruction in two ways.

> It has its roots in a passive resistance of separation in which the meaning and value of Corsican is carefully cordoned off from the official, authoritative and authoritarian domains of the dominant language. Described in this way, this sort of resistance illustrates the pervasive hold of essentialist models of language and identity and does not challenge a … system in which the minority language is

> excluded from the powerful linguistic marketplace occupied by the dominant language (1999, 160).

In other words, she suggests that Corsicans arguing that the *true* Corsican language is spontaneous and natural, as opposed to standardized and schooled, effectively creates a realm for Corsican unto itself, and in doing so marks it as bounded and unified, thus reproducing the very "essentializing" ideals about language they are trying to resist.

Alternatively, she interprets this "resistance of separation," as

> evidence of a political consciousness; it reflects an understanding of the relationship between linguistic prescriptions and social power…'strategic essentialism'…[it shows] Corsicans resisting Corsican language planning from the same position that some Corsican language planners resisted French domination. (1999, 161)

From this point of view, Jaffe argues that Corsicans are resisting the newfound "authoritarian" positions of Corsican language planners who are in the position to prescribe linguistic norms. By insisting that Corsican is a language that is non-standardizable, and constructing it as existing in a realm "apart", Corsicans are strategically resisting new forms of social power.

While neither of these analyses is necessarily wrong, they, in keeping with the anthropological framework outlined in Chapter IV, only consider the Corsican preoccupation with spontaneity and natural emergence as an ideological "construction" designed to position Corsican language use. Jaffe's analysis suggests that, in a sense, either the actors do not *really* believe in the existence of the Corsican "authenticity" that they assert [strategic essentialism], *or* they are acting under a kind of false consciousness as a result of the epistemologically colonizing influence of France. Neither of these analyses seems to me sufficient to describe the situation.

Given the arguments I have offered, Jaffe's analytic model may miss an important third possibility, which is that people *truly* believe in the authenticity and truth of their culture and identity, *and* they are not misguided. It should be clear at this point that this is not a return to Enlightenment "essentialism" in which unity and homogeneity of cultural traits are indicators of some inherent and fixed cultural object. Rather, it is to suggest that there is a notion of "essence" and "authenticity" at stake here, which is not based in ideals of homogeneity, but instead in powerful encounters with emergence, chance, inconsistency, contingency and incertitude.

Jaffe argues that Corsican language activists are faced with a "difficult balancing act…between drawing on the power of *separate* identity in the quest to revitalize a minority language and acknowledging the plural linguistic and cultural nature of minority identity and lived experience" (1999, 190). Where there is an inherent struggle built into the Corsican quest to indicate their cultural essence and authenticity, to cast it as a struggle between problematic age-old ideals of unity and essence on the one hand, and newfound "progressive" ideals about plurality on the other is, I believe, to misunderstand it.

In the cases I've described, Corsican militants are moved by the way in which a particular paghjella or a piece of cheese or stone wall reveal the contingency and incertitude inherent to their realities, in a sense announcing, like Benjamin's understanding of the authenticity of a piece of art work, that they are emerging presently as themselves and nothing else. They are suggesting that there is an "essential" element of these cultural processes and products that one can never simply extract and identify, because the moment of emergence is past. Today, many Corsican militants strive to

highlight this, to, in a sense, point to the *fact* that this paghjella, this cheese, this language, this people exist, for real, here and now. However, every time they try to indicate the essence they are preoccupied with, by pointing to it and valorizing it, they necessarily misrepresent it. The spontaneous becomes framed, and that which is valued because of its incertitude becomes delineated. And they are aware of this. So, these Corsican militants constantly build and tear down the frames they create in efforts to indicate their cultural essence. Moreover, rather than being engaged in a "balancing act," in which they consider what tactics will allow them to benefit from a unified vision of language without compromising diversity, I will argue that they are in the midst of a fascinating, if tragic, cultural identity crisis.

[xli] The terza "enters on the fifth degree of the scale, thereafter using this note as the nodal point around which it constructs melismatic figures that punctuate those of the secunda. Whereas the latter is principally implicated in the provision of melodic and rhythmic definition and is horizontal in conception, the terza has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. While its drone-like character ensures continuity of sound, the singer also has to seek out the spaces in which to place his notes in relation to the secunda line; he is more concerned with intervals than with melody. The voice is comparatively shrill and often highly nasalized, which lends it a powerful ringing quality. The terza makes a distinctive contribution to the final cadence by resolving onto a sharpened third…often not strictly speaking, quite sharp enough to be major"(Bithell 2007, 37)

[xlii] It is more than a little ironic that the "reality" of the vrai tradition, which is linked in an important sense to its spontaneity and profane quality, is felt to be particularly present in an abandoned mountain village, on a special, even "sacred" occasion. The tension that these Corsican militants feel between the profane and the sacred, is the subject of the next chapter. Here we are interested in identifying the character of paghjella singing that militants like Anto feel is the core or "essence" of this tradition.

[xliii] This utter focus on the emergent present is reminiscent of Benjamin's concept of "messianic time" which Benedict Anderson picks up on in his discussion of tradition. As Anderson explains, in messianic time "there is a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present…."(1983, 24).

[xliv] Today, frequently singers double and even triple the bass line, which leads to groups of paghjella singers of four and sometimes more.

[xlv] It is important to note, that not all Sardinian singing is practiced and polished. Sardinian's oral tradition includes "La Gara Poetica" which is improvisational singing. As Mathias puts it, "Individual creativity is valued above all other skills…the talent of a

poet to improvise freely, to entertain and amuse listeners, and to put down his opponent with his insults appears to be valued above all other abilities"(Mathias 1976, 491). This kind of singing, traditionally among shepherds, still exists in some areas of the island today. It bears great resemblence to the Corsican Chjam'è Rispondi (dialogic singing) which is, like the gara poetica, an improvised verbal joust.

[xlvi] Marie-Cécile critique of the university resonates with Lacan's understanding of the University discourse, in his model of four orders of discourse (Lacan, 1991). For Lacan University discourse has as its object to produce "knowledge as the ultimate object of desire"(McMahon 1997, 2). University discourse is based on researched findings advanced through the generation of knowledge, and nothing is too large or too small to be considered. The violence of this discourse lies in the fact that knowledge production appears to bring the subject incrementally closer to his object of study, yet no matter how close he gets, it still lies outside of grasp. Knowledge as the object of desire combined with the inability to attain the object and disciplinary forces that self-police and push for its attainment, constitute the violence of this discourse. Arguably, Marie-Cécile is calling into question the self-evidence of modes of university truth production, which is the kind of deconstruction that Lacan calls for, in so far as the more fully these discourses are "exposed, the less capable they are of exercising their mesmerizing power"(Bracher 1993, 59). Thus, one might interpret Marie-Cécile's critique of the Corsican University as an extension of a Lacanian vision. Marie-Cécile was educated at a French University in the 1960s, when Lacan's theory was influencing France's intellectuals. However, neither she, nor any of the militants I spoke with, every made reference to Lacan or any other philosophers or theorists. However it is very likely that their attitudes were influenced by an intellectual environment in which deconstructive tendencies of this sort were taking hold.

[xlvii] And, one might argue, people influenced by Western rationalism at large.

[xlviii] In anticipation of the next chapters, it is important to make a note about Coti's discussion of *parole* (speech). In contemporary anthropology, under the influence of post-structuralist arguments, de Saussure's distinction between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech) has been subject to great criticism (Bourdieu 1999, Tedlock and Mannheim 1995, Bakhtin 1981). Rather than understanding speech to be the imperfect instantiation of language as such, post-structural socio-linguists have argued that speech with all its imperfections and social implications *is* the locus of *real* language. This has often translated into a concern with multi-vocalness and linguistic plurality, in contrast to unified structural visions of *langue.* However, what Coti indicates, which will be vital in the next chapter, is that it is not heterogeneity itself that is at stake when one considers *parole*, but the junction between space and time and the *undeterminedness* inherent to it.

[xlix] Levi Strauss has famously argued that "bricolage" is characteristic of a "primitive" mind. He described it in this way: "There still exists among ourselves an activity which on the technical plane gives us quite a good understanding of what a science we prefer to call 'prior' rather than 'primitive', could have been on the plane of speculation. This is what is commonly called 'bricolage' in French. In its old sense the verb 'bricoler' applied to ball games and billiards, to hunting, shooting and riding. It was however always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle. And in our own time the

'bricoleur' is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman. The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire, which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual 'bricolage' --which explains the relation which can be perceived between the two"(1962, 19).

[1] Unlike a paghjella song session, in which "chance" of this sort can be felt as a constant companion of the song's emergence, with the "authentic" cheese there is a more stable end product—an object, a round of brocciu, for example. And, there is a consequence to this relative stability. When the specificity and particularity of the cheese is highlighted, as Casgiu Casanu brochure does: "the perfumed plants of the maquis and the great manual skill and experience of each shepherd, confer on their cheese a bouquet and personality directly link to the territory," it is easy to objectify these "particularities." One might say, "authentic" Corsican cheese is that which tastes and smells like the maquis: briar, broom, heather, lavender, lentisk, rockrose, arbutus, and myrtle etc. And one might attempt to identify the bricolage of shepherd's savoir-faire that takes on form in the end products. And, this has been done, frequently, in riacquistu-driven documentation of the traditional savoir-faire. (See in particular Luccioni 2008).

Arguably, however, this documentation, like Stephanie's efforts, miscalculates what the shepherds are indicating about their product, and what makes it "good" or "authentic." This "authenticity" has to do with chance. While it *is* the particularity and variation of objects (unique cheeses) that traditional shepherds valorize; one could not capture the "authenticity" at stake by documenting the sum total of these varied objects, because this hypothetical sum total of variation is not exactly the same thing as the "authenticity" that it bears witness to.

Chapter VI
A Crisis of Identity and Theoretical Reflections
The Tension between the Ordinary and the Analytic

In the last chapter, I described cultural discourses, activities, and objects in the milieu of Corsican cultural militancy, all of which indicate the kind of "essence" that the militants I studied are preoccupied with. I argued that the claimed essence is not one in which homogeneous or unified cultural, linguistic, or historical traits are thought to legitimize an immemorial and pure community. Rather, the vision of authentic and essential Corsican identity, tradition, and language at stake is based in the experience of emergence, contingence, and incertitude. These characteristics are often described by militants using language like "experience," "life," and "spirit," and contrasted with "inauthentic" representations of culture that militants critique as codified, standardized, documented, extracted, analyzed, reified, etc**.** There are clear ways in which the Corsican distinctions between experience and codification resonate with important lines of argument in contemporary social thought that seek to make a similar distinction. In particular, I will consider Marx's critique of ideology and its influence on the Frankfurt school, the turn towards phenomenology seen in Bergson and modified in Heidegger, and the praxis theory of Bourdieu. I look at this scholarship to aid in the understanding of what is at stake for Corsicans.

Before I consider the link between Corsican essentialism and social theory, it is important to further complicate the Corsican quest for the real with four more probing examples that reveal the kinds of anxieties that this group of militants face in their efforts

to valorize this "experiential truth" because, perhaps more than anything else, these anxieties are indicative of what that experiential truth is (or is not).

Anto

Anto's conscious desire for natural emergence of the vrai tradition, his enthusiasm about taking pilgrimages into the mountains, and his (and many militants') constant rumination about the relative "authenticity" of the practices unfolding before him are, ironically, not in keeping with the spontaneity he hopes to achieve. His desire for the Corsican tradition to simply be "the way one goes on," without reflection, simply "because," does not cohere with the need to hike miles into the heart of the island to a corpse of a village in order to access the tradition. Anto is constantly orchestrating situations in which paghjella singing feels "natural" and "spontaneous" and "in the moment." He also glorifies these situations and the songs to himself and others, considering them to be, in a sense "sacred." Perhaps most problematically, Anto struggles with the way in which the paghjella becomes set off from ordinary life *because* of his very efforts. This comes across in his perpetual critique of the very events he attends with such enthusiasm, events he himself has often helped organize and been at the center of.

Every time we attended an event with Anto, he left telling us it was not the "vrai, vrai tradition." Though there were times during the event when he was content, pleased with how things were going, by the end, he would almost always critique other participants for not singing with the whole of themselves, for watching the singing as though it was a performance, for using guitars or reading traditional lyrics from song books, etc. More often than not, however, during the event in question, Anto had been, in

no uncertain terms, the main orchestrator of the song. He never implicated himself in his critiques directly, but there was no way he wasn't, at some level, aware of his large role in these events. And so I always left wondering how much of his disappointment and frustration was also with himself.

He would try *so* hard, almost too hard, to produce a certain type of cultural milieu, and I could watch the ways in which his efforts could do more to stifle the naturalness of events than anything else. When we got home from the pilgrimage described in the last chapter, to my surprise, Anto explained to me that what happened that day was not entirely the "vrai tradition." He tried to explain, with his wife Pauline's help, that some of the singing there was too performative. He didn't like the monodic songs, the guitar, etc. He explained that was why he had left the small house where, at one point, people had crammed in to listen to people singing. "That's why I came outside to sing the paghjella again," he said. He found that people were too concerned with trying to show their own voices, too many people were judging how everyone sang, rather than just singing for the sake of singing.

Towards the end of that afternoon in the abandoned village, after the singing had gone on for almost 5 hours, an elderly man sitting next to me had said, "See that one there [pointing to Anto], that's not singing…that's yelling," which at that point was just the way I felt. "It's too much" the man said, as the veins in Anto's neck throbbed and his face turned red. "These guys are not that good," he said to my surprise given how many people had talked about these singers being the most Corsican of the Corsican. "People think anyone can sing the paghjella, but that's not true…either you have the voice or you don't...." He stopped and changed his train of thought, "I mean the *true* chant, it doesn't

matter, I don't care…you know the Corsicans appreciate the mistakes, it shows that its *vivant* [living]…everyone should be able to sing…for that these guys are great." Anto launched his next verse and the man turned to back to me, "But him, that's too much. You want the voice to just come, he pushes too much, it's *trop*…"

Anto was one of the most passionate and devoted cultural militants I met during my fieldwork. He was also one of the most troubled. There were certainly times during the many social gatherings we attended with him that paghjella singing was clearly deeply fulfilling for him. Standing close, in a ring of fellow singers, joking between verses and then throwing the whole of himself into the song when a new verse started—Anto was the most comfortable and jovial when taking part in paghjella singing. And although after hours of singing, his continued efforts to bring a secunda's passion to an event, which on all counts was winding down, could border on the absurd; the character of his yearning itself was deeply moving.

On the one hand, Anto wants the paghjella to fall naturally from his and others lips, like speech. Because he devotes so much of his time and energy towards pursuing this "natural" emergence and judging other's corruption of it, he often quickly pulls the moments of "natural emergence" into relief and in doing so changes them into the very thing he loathes. On the other hand, and this is not quite the same, there is a sense in which Anto *never* wants the paghjella singing to stop. In principle, his vision of living in the vrai tradition is one in which this quality of spontaneity and emergence propels all engagement that one has with "authentic" ways of being. This desire is indicative of a deeper tension at the heart of his and other's quest for *real* identity.

The "experiential" character of authentic cultural identity that these militants seem to be after is, as I indicated in the last chapter, not *more* true of paghejlla singing than it is of performative singing. It is not *more* true about the village square in the abandoned village than it is about the populated village squares down below. Indeed, these Corsicans do seem to indicate this themselves. What is important, they say repeatedly, is not that the ordinary emergence is a "sacred" feature of traditional cultural processes and objects, but on the contrary, that it is "importantly" profane.

In other words, it is not as though the paghjella, the traditional cheese, the pierre séche wall, etc. are exceptional objects and processes that possess a sacred "traditional" feature, some essence that is the *source* of their authenticity (which is what riacquistu representations of the Corsican culture documented in museums, books, etc. risk suggesting). The spontaneity and emergence that makes these cultural phenomena so exciting for these cultural militants is the totally ordinary feature of them—that they have unrolled uniquely in real time. One would be right to ask, "Well, doesn't every existing cultural process and product fall under that description—real, emergent, here and now?" The answer seems to be, in a straightforward sense, yes. The people who sit on the outskirts of the paghjella singing circles, discussing what their children are up to, their plans for the summer, or whatever else, are in the midst of emergent, unique, singular realities, unfolding before them. They are embedded in the very "spontaneous experience" that Corsican militants seem to be chasing.

At one level, we can argue that what these cultural militants want is to return the traditional features of Corsican life to that realm—so that people sing traditional songs with as much ease as they engage in their passing conversations, or that they speak

Corsican as readily as they do French. We could say this is a nostalgic longing to go back to the "good old days." However, Anto and the other examples we will see in this section suggest that there is something additional going on. What these Corsican militants seem to want is not simply to replace contemporary ways of going on with traditional ones, replacing one "ordinary" for another. Rather, they seem to be preoccupied with a type of encounter in which they are *overwhelmed* by the singularity and spontaneous emergence of ordinary experience itself. They are calling attention to what we might call the exceptional character of the ordinary—the simple fact that the "authentic" or the "true" does not lie above or beyond the ordinary but is powerfully revealed in each moment as it unfolds as never before.

Recall the interview excerpts in Chapter III, Patrizia's and Jacques Thiers' explanations of their original engagement in the riacquistu. Thiers asks, "Why was this language, one I had always spoken, one that was so familiar to me, so close to me, not written? How could I not have considered this before?... What *was* this language that was so much mine?..." And, Patrizia says she realized she had "a patrimonial richness that…sticks to me like my skin…a deep part of my being…." In most cases, people were (and are) impassioned, not because they've come in contact with identifiable features of cultural life that they had never witnessed before, or features that they were stunned by because they were radically out of the ordinary (*extra*ordinary). Rather, people were overwhelmed as they considered, in a new way, the natural emergence of *ordinary* ways of being, speaking, singing, preparing food, etc.. The embeddedness itself, the ordinariness itself, was powerfully revealing of *the fact* that Corsica *actually* has a tradition, a *vrai* tradition.

When Dominique says, "This is who we *really* are and it had been hidden from us," it is not as though the young Corsicans flooding back to the villages in the 1960s and 70s had *never* heard the Corsican language or a shepherd's songs, or eaten the figatellu or brocciu. Rather, they stood in awe of the implication the ordinariness of these practices had for their own identities. They began to see the culture, the products, processes, ways of being—like the aromas, textures and flavors of a piece of traditional cheese--as speaking beyond themselves, not to a state of ethnic or cultural purity, but, in a sense more powerfully, to a contingent trajectory that Corsican people have taken through time. As powerful (perhaps *more* powerful) than the textures, sounds, tastes, etc. has been the sentiment of reality and actuality that such a confrontation has resulted in.

If Anto no longer felt that paghjella singing was somehow especially important and valuable, if his encounters with the tradition were no longer awe inspiring, his militant engagement would cease, because this is precisely what compels him towards the tradition. However, the "awe" he feels, which drives him to announce the tradition rather than just live it, also continually seems to undermine the very thing he wants to indicate.

*Dum*é

In a focus group I held in a Corsican class of 20 students at the University, when we talked about Corsican "tradition," the conversation turned quickly (as it almost always did) to "traditional" music. The young professor, Dumé, who is himself a militant singer, asked his students what they considered to be music of the "tradition." They responded that there were two kinds of Corsican music in the tradition—the paghjella and the music of Canta u Populu Corsu, the militant group founded in the 1970s that is responsible for popularizing Corsican music (see Chapter III).

The professor was dismayed. He explained to the students, with more than a little exasperation, that Canta is *not* the "real tradition." They began talking about the paghjella. He asked where the students hear the traditional paghjella. They answered in church (the mass is sung in paghjella form). "But, the paghjella is not a 'sacred' song he insisted, you know that right? The tradition is not 'sacred,' not something in churches," he continued, getting more heated. "It's the ordinary songs of shepherds, of your grandparents, they sing it just the way we talk to each other, in passing, *comme ça* [like that]…."

In the spring, Dumé invited me to a concert in Ajaccio, called "*Comptoir Corse*" This translates as Corsican Counter, indicating the counter of a bar. Dumé promised me the event would be something "very special." The advertisement for the concert read: "For one night, we leave the performative space, constrained by and suited for the stage, in order to rediscover the improvisational and convivial space of a bar and a fête!" (L'Aghja, Season Program 2007-2008).

To recreate the informal atmosphere of a bar, where much of today's spontaneous paghjella singing occurs (see Chapter III), a fully functioning Corsican bar was built on the stage! A group of singers, who were (intentionally) *not* part of the same musical group, were invited to participate without rehearsal to reproduce the "vrai" tradition. The idea, not unlike Anto's trek into the abandoned village, was to combat the "patrimoinilization" of the tradition, in which by framing or staging or standardizing the tradition, it is turned into something false. The audience was seated at café tables, surrounding the bar, as though it was a village *place* in the summertime. The singers sat at the corner of the bar facing towards each other, backs to the audience. Putting a bar

and “non-performative” bar-singing on a stage, in an attempt to capture something spontaneous, was a remarkable concept, if paradoxical, deeply problematic, and doomed to fail. While intriguing, this “very special” non-performative performance of the ordinary, could not and did not produce the desired effect.

At the beginning of the performance, we were welcomed by a man in a dark suit. He encouraged us to get up whenever we wanted to get drinks and food from the bar on the stage. We were meant to feel “comfortable," to act as though we were *au village*. I smiled thinking that I never *simply* felt comfortable in a village square in Corsica, that no one ever welcomed me into any bar or public sphere, and that I was far more comfortable sitting in this audience where the members had come together for an explicit, and in a sense neutral, purpose, to experience the vrai tradition. As discussed in Chapter I, au village, in the natural unfolding of social realities in which these paghjella events actually take place, one is never a passive observer. One’s very presence demands a reaction from others or conscious non-reaction.

It wasn’t until after the concert had ended, and the audience had left (I remained to interview some of the participants), when the singers and their friends took seats at the constructed bar and began to socialize and drink together, that spontaneous singing emerged. It was the same bar, still on a stage, still in a theater, with many of the same singers, but only when the intention towards spontaneity behind the evening had waned did the *vrai fête* begin.

Salini and the Patrimoine Immatériel

Dominique Salini, a professor of Corsican music at the University who is openly suspicious of the riacquistu, argues in *La polyphonie corse traditionnelle peut-elle*

disparaître? [Traditional Corsican Polyphony, Could it Disappear?], a book she co-edited in 2008:

> The birth of the 'cultural [musical] group' after 1968, presented Corsica with a new chance to avoid the fossilization of traditions, thanks to the renewal of live shows…but this masked other risks, in particular, new forms of folklorization. The weight of the new mode was underestimated, above all as the music became mediatized…this became an insidious transformation because it imperceptibly touched the heart of the musical structure. Progressively, the paghjella…left the realm of construction *in situ,* in an empirical, harmonic space, and became *la polyphonie corse,* with all the media success that we know today….Paradoxically, the cultural groups created to defend and *faire vivre* the traditional polyphony, discovered, in a very pragmatic (yet nonetheless paradoxical) way, that realizing their goal was impossible.…By adapting progressively to the political and media demands and the imperatives of cultural institutions, everything that makes the paghjella a historical and anthropological enigma has progressively been abandoned…Harmonization and resolution are the two privileged aesthetic criteria…at the expense of the temporal flexibility of the song, otherwise put, the songs' originality. (120)

Salini was instrumental in getting the paghjella to be recognized by Unesco in 2009, as part of its list of *Patrimoine Immatérial,* "intangible heritage." For Salini, Unesco's focus on immaterial heritage, which began in 2001, and its consideration of the paghjella in 2008, marked vital steps in the right direction, in so far as this category explicitly focuses on the oral, temporal, and non-standardized reality of the traditional repertoire.

Unesco's relatively newfound interest in the patromine immatérial appears to recognize and validate many of the Corsican militants' current concerns, not to mention suggesting that these concerns also are felt elsewhere.[li] The Unesco text reads,

> Cultural heritage is not limited to material manifestations, such as monuments and objects that have been preserved over time. This notion also encompasses living expressions and the traditions that countless groups and communities worldwide have inherited from their ancestors and transmit to their descendants, in most cases orally….Many years of research undertaken by UNESCO on the

> functions and values of cultural expressions and practices have opened the door to new approaches to the understanding, protection and respect of the cultural heritage of humanity. This living heritage, known as intangible, provides each bearer of such expressions a sense of identity and continuity, insofar as he or she takes ownership of them and constantly recreates them.[lii]

In my interview with Salini, she told me that she believes that "In light of the new debates surrounding the patrimoine immatériel, the approach to preserving the Corsican polyphony may succeed in escaping the ideological discourse born in the 1970s." However, as I have suggested thus far, for many Corsican militants, the issue is not simply (or even primarily) the desire to replace one list of identifiable traits of traditional singing (melodies and lyrics) with a new set of identifiable traits (descriptions of soundscapes and temporality). Rather than editing the frames surrounding the tradition to be "more accurate," the real issue is the corrupting force of recognition and framing itself. Salini's enthusiasm did not catch on.

Leading up to the paghjella's inclusion in the Unesco list, a weekend supplement of the local paper was devoted to the subject, with the headline "*La Paghjella Sacrée par l'Unesco?* (The Paghjella, Consecrated by Unesco?) The title of the article is revealing of the different levels at which the issue resonates with the Corsican public. On the one hand, the headline can and should be read as a question brimming with anticipation and even hope, "Will Unesco consecrate the paghjella?" Will the paghjella, which so many militants feel is a fundamental (even sacred) vector of their cultural tradition be recognized and valorized by Unesco? It is from this point of view, that many of those interviewed in the article, said things like, "It can only be seen as a plus…its inscription…will permit it to be better respected…" Many of those interviewed were

particularly taken by the idea of the international prestige the paghjella would acquire if recognized by Unesco.

On the other hand, one can, and should, in light of the widespread criticism of the "sacralization" (consecration) of the tradition, read the headline with worry and trepidation, "Will the Unesco consecrate the paghjella?" And in fact, it is this sentiment that dominates the expressions of those interviewed in the article (primarily cultural militants). In the context of this particular debate, the worry was discussed as "*Le danger de la sanctuarisation"* (the danger of the sanctification) of the tradition. The article quotes many singers. Jean-Claude Acquaviva, from the group *A Filetta,* says that the paghjella's recognition by Unesco should be approached with "satisfaction but suspicion…On the one hand," he says, "we must rejoice about it, but if we obtain this inscription, we must do everything we can to make sure that it results in the real safeguarding and valorization of our paghjella. What we can not put up with are indirectly harmful effects of this distinction, notably the phenomenon of "Sanctuarisation," which is really not desirable" (*La Corse Votre Hebdo,* April 4-10, 2008, 10). A traditional singer from Rusio says, "I'm not really sure what this will bring. It is positive, I suppose, but in order to do what? Teach the paghejlla? Can one, and *should* one, teach it knowing that one sings differently depending on the village, pieve, on the heritage that each one was taught? We must not tend towards a uniform paghjella sung everywhere…"(10).

The concerns expressed by these cultural militants are virtually the same as Salini's concerns. Her enthusiasm about the possibility of an organized forum for cultural recognition and valorization that attends to the oral, emergent character of the

vrai tradition is not enough to allay militants' sentiments that standards and recognition are *themselves* the real problem.

Jean-Pierre

When I first met Jean-Pierre in 2004, he was expressing his passion for the traditional music in his work with a singing group. But even then, he seemed bothered by it, insisting that his group only put *one* paghjella on their disc out of respect for the vrai tradition. When I returned in 2007, I ran into him at a pilgrimage, not unlike Anto's, in in the mountains of the Bozio above San Petrone, and I watched as he sang with older village members.

During the three years that I was gone, Jean-Pierre felt he had discovered how to engage in the tradition in a way that "respects it." He proudly told me that he has been attending all of the events "in the tradition" that he possibly can—pilgrimages, marendellas, village fêtes, etc. Using a mini video recorder, he has recorded all the singing sessions, "á la tradition," which he attends. He then transcribes the songs, in longhand in large black books (of which he now has 17). Then, he goes to see the singers, often old men, to check his transcriptions. He types the songs, and saves them in a large computerized database with the video recordings. The recordings are saved by place, date, and song. He has attended hundreds of events and the database is growing. He showed me this data collection and proudly announced, "these, *these* are saved!"

When I visited him at the video store where he worked, he pulled up an example of his *travaille* [work] on the computer. "Look" he said, "You see, Camellu," and he pointed to a frozen video frame of the same man we'd seen sing on the mountaintop the week before. I nodded. "Camellu, he is there," he said and pressed play, and we watched

Camellu sing a traditional monodic song at a picnic in the mountains. It was a smaller gathering than the one where I'd heard him sing. He sat, beside singers I recognized, at a long table of family and friends. Camellu is a wonderful looking man in his late 60s. His face is rough and tan and wildly expressive when he sings. He tilts his head slightly to the side with his hand at his ear to help hear himself. His eyes are open but roll up a bit as he sings, and he sways slightly with the song. His voice is rough, it's wobbly, and you could hear the sound of the breeze against the video-recorder. Jean-Pierre beamed. When Camellu finished the song, the table of his family and friends erupted in applause and laughter.

"This song," Jean-Pierre said, "it is the same song, the same that Maì Pesce [a famous Corsican singer] sings… the song is on one of Maì Pesce's CDs." He reached for a stack of discs and put it on for me, humming the song as he found the track he was looking for. "An example," he said looking up at me, "*voila.*"

Maì Pesce's rendition of the song begins with a reverberating and very produced sounding classical guitar part. As Maì Pesce began to sing, Jean-Pierre playfully mimicked his operatic voice as the notes soared. Over the music, he turned to me and said, "Now you can do whatever you want…" and we listened to a bit more. He stopped the song and continued, "Or you can do what Camellu does, but it's not the same! You can't tell me it's the same."

"You're going to ask me," he went on, "what's the difference between this and that," he said, "but what do you want me to say? You have to listen." And we listened. "The problem is," Jean-Pierre began again, "the people, the people are used to…" He imitated Maì Pesce's grandiose operatic voice again, and I laughed.

"If you sing," and Jean-Pierre sang the final note of the song at medium volume, "they clap a bit," he said. "If you sing…" and he sang the final note a bit louder, higher and fuller, and he clapped more. "If you sing…" and he fantastically belted the high final note and then clapped furiously.

"What's good," he continued, "is that at least the people know the traditional song, but…what I say, is that it's not the same, *not at all*."

We spent the next hour or so watching different videos Jean-Pierre has filmed over the past few years at different mountain gatherings, and compared them to videos he has of the most famous Corsican groups. Toward the end, Jean-Pierre told me, "what the singers do today is crap…no, no, listen…each person should sing his possibility, what he wants, but each one, in my opinion, should make an effort for the tradition and the culture…You can, you *can* make this," he said indicating the Maì Pesce CD, "for example Camellu…can he go on stage? Him, Camellu, he is capable, you see how he is. Give him a guitar and a song to learn and he can sing, 'ching, ching. ching;' [he strummed an imaginary guitar], but those singers you saw last night [referring to a professional concert I had seen the previous night boasting 'the most beautiful voices in Corsica'], they cannot sing as Camellu does. They cannot, not *anymore*! That means that…and it's not malicious what I say…this good man here," he says pointing again toward Maì Pesce, "he cannot learn, because he didn't learn. The problem is that every year you have more and more who sing, 'yah, yah, yah' and less and less who sing like Dumé and Camellu, less and less."

"But, your goal," I asked him, "if you could transmit everything you're collecting to people…" he interrupted me, "I'm going to do it!" "Yes," I continued, "but do you

think you can transmit it outside of this milieu," I said indicating the frozen image on the screen, "the mountains, the family, etc?"

He skipped over my question. "Me," he continued, "what I want, well, first of all is, me, I want to learn. But then, I am in the generation between the young people who don't know and the *anciens*…I want to make the link, let them know! But…but in making the link, we have to be intelligent about it. Me, I sing professionally, in concerts, often. I like to. But, it's necessary, from time to time, (and many singers, they don't) for everyone to come down from the stage and to work, to work in this sense here," he nodded towards the screen. "If no, Camellu is going to die, Dumé is going to die, and this [he points to Camellu] will be gone."

There was obvious irony in Jean-Pierre's comments and in his project, which is an impressive and important body of work. In all of the conversations we had about the dangers faced by the vrai tradition he would, as he did in this conversation, suggest that there was something he could not explain, a difference between the singers like Camellu and performative singers, and to know it one had to be there, to experience it. In this interview, he was invigorated. He felt optimistic, as though he had found the solution. He would combat the standardization by capturing the diversity, the specificity. This project was a profoundly anthropological and ethnographic enterprise, not unlike those of earlier riacquistu efforts. However Jean-Pierre's aim, unlike the earlier efforts, is to document multi-vocality and heterogeneity.

However, in our conversations, it was never just diversity that he was concerned with. Echoing the concerns of Salini, Anto, Marie-Cécile and others, he told me, that learning the paghjella requires a "*rapport avec la terre, l'espace*…" (rapport with the

land and space). When I asked him *where* he wanted to transmit his findings, he said he didn't know, and when I suggested the University, he scoffed, and recalled an earlier conversation he and I had had about Salini's book, "*La polyphonie corse traditionnelle peut-elle disparaître?"*

"What do you do so that a tradition doesn't die? It's *not* write a book that says, 'will the polyphonic *chante* disappear?' *Je m'en fou de ça*" (I don't care about that)." He insists that what people have to do is *sing,* not talk about whether the singing will disappear or not, and this singing has to be informed by what Camellu and Dumé are doing, not only harmonically and melodically, but in a sense, spiritually. The young singers have to learn that the operatic surges and harmonic resolution on the Maì Pesce CD are *not* the point.

When Jean-Pierre nodded towards the screen, with the frozen picture of Camellu, to indicate the kind of "work" that militants should do in order to preserve the tradition, it was unclear whether he meant militants should *sing* as Camellu does or whether they should *collect videos* of the singing, as Jean-Pierre does. In some sense, Jean-Pierre thinks they should be doing both. When it comes down to it, his passion for the tradition is not satisfied simply by singing. The passion, which consists of the deep value that he places on the tradition itself, compels Jean-Pierre, as it compels Anto, to find a way to indicate this value.

These Corsican militants are compelled by a vision of the authentic, a vision of authenticity and essence that moves them, impassions them. If they were simply embedded in ordinary traditional ways of yore, and were not at all compelled to reflect on what this ordinariness bears witness to, they would just be "in it." On the one hand, this

seems to be what they are after. However, if they succeeded, the power of the ordinary, the truth embedded in the contingent, would recede. And this is not what they are after. People would eat traditional cheese because that's what they eat. The cheese would not pulse with the singular conditions of its own emergence. People would gather stones and build pierre séche walls, but the cobbled together wall would not point beyond itself to the particular conditions of its own production, because in order to be moved by this aspect of these cultural products and processes, one would have to *reflect* upon something that these physical objects and concrete processes suggest about themselves—that they are actual, real, here and now. And, in doing this, as Corsican militants so often do, they would move from the realm of emergent experience to the realm of reflection and framed experience.

Theoretical Parallels

So they have a problem. And, it's not a new one. Reflection corrupts reflex, framing alters experience, the analytical alienates us from the ordinary, on the one hand. And on the other hand, the power of reflex, experience, and the ordinary, which compels these Corsican militants to reject the framed and theoretical as somehow artificial, is only available to them in this latter realm, which they have in principle rejected. They want it both ways: for their traditions to feel both ordinary and sacred, to be reflexive and reflective, to be on the inside and the outside, to be both native and anthropologist.

Over the course of the 20th century, the question of the relationship between the experience and the frame, between the ordinary and the analytic, between the particular and the categorical, between "thing as they are" and representations has been central to intellectual debate in virtually all social scientific and humanities fields. And, these

debates reflect the many tensions that arise for Corsican militants in their attempts to locate the essential and the authentic.

The overarching trend in today's intellectual treatments of these issues is one that calls into question the primacy of the analytic, theoretical, and the framed, which on all counts has dominated Western thought since the scientific revolution. In other words, rather than understanding the experiential and spontaneous as derivatives of underlying structures (whether cultural, scientific, psychological, cognitive, etc.), theorists have sought to re-center the experiential and the spontaneous. I will consider the way some of the tensions indicated by the Corsican situation surface in the realm of theory by examining the legacy of Marx's critique of ideology and notion of alienation; the phenomenological critique of "measurable" time, and Bourdieu's theory of practice. These lines of argument developed by these scholars help to sort out what these Corsican militants are struggling with.

Marx

In this section, I will consider how Marx's argument about class struggle in society can be understood in terms of the alienation that occurs as a result of the human tendency towards *classification.* Read in this way, many of Marx's main concerns overlap importantly with Corsican militant belief that the codification and standardization of their tradition alienates people from the "authenticity" of their condition.

Marx describes humans as a "species being," a being that "adopts the species as his object…because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a universal and therefore free being" (1988, 112). For Marx, humans perpetually misunderstand themselves and their relationship to their worlds. He argues

that production is humans' "species activity," and the objects of man's production, the products of his labor, (whether physical or ideological) are the way he "first really proves himself to be a species being" (1988, 144).

From this point of view, humans realize the universality of their condition through its exteriorization, in the form of production.[liii] However, Marx suggests, because the objects and ideas man produces exist apart from him, they tend to exert power over him. Ultimately, he argues, the objects of man's labor are mistaken as the independent source or embodiment of the universal, and man seeks (desperately) to re-appropriate, to own, these objects, rather than understanding them, in terms of their mode of production, as an extension of his own being. This is what Marx refers to as "commodity fetishism." In this way, alienated from the true conditions of their production, the products of man's labor come to enslave him. As Marx puts it,

> The object which labor produces—labor's product—confronts [man] as *something alien,* as a power *independent* of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification. In the sphere of political economy this realization of labor appears as *loss of realization* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object* and *bondage to it;* appropriation as *estrangement,* as *alienation.* (1988, 108)

For the Corsican militants of the last few chapters, the cultural products and processes they valorize as "authentic" are those that reveal the conditions of their own production.

Today Corsican militants argue that the way in which the riaquistu has standardized the tradition, smoothed the rough edges, extracted underlying structures, grammars, histories, and explanations to put into museums and books, masks the non-reproducible and utterly particular character of "authentic" culture. This authenticity

comes into being, like human being itself, once *and only* once, not as a derivative of something external to itself, but in a primary, ontological sense.

Militants are worried that the deluge of frames that have come to describe these cultural products and processes as a result of the riacquistu will, in a sense, further alienate the Corsican population. Where riacquistu cultural production may effectively produce younger generations who know the lyrics and melodies to old songs, recipes to old dishes, Corsican expressions, etc., the worry is that it may also result in a rapport with culture, identity, language and the tradition in which Corsicans feel that musical scores, ethnographic accounts, museum displays etc. have privileged access to the "true" culture, and fetishize them as sacred. Militants believe, as Marx argues, that if people strive to reappropriate these cultural products and processes in this "sacralized" form, they will be further estranged from the authenticity of their culture, understanding it as something independent of them, out there for acquisition, rather than as a powerful and "ordinary" extension of their being.

A second, related, realm of Marx's theory that sheds light on the Corsican struggle is his concern with ideology. As, Fry (2009) puts it, for Marx,

> Ideology is essentially the belief that perspective is truth. That is to say, that the way in which things appear from the material and economically grounded standpoint of my own consciousness is not just the way they appear to me, but the way they actually *are*.

Marx argues that this mode of universalizing a particular perspective is an inevitable characteristic of the dominant class in society. He argues, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas"(1998, 68).

In my reading, this is not simply an argument about self-interest or class-interest in the sense that the elites are in the position to impose beliefs on the masses that result in

the securing of their own socio-economic privilege (though this is obviously part of it). Marx's account of what the imposition of ideology amounts to is complicated. He argues that there is a revolutionary impulse in all society because the dominant ideals about the way the world is are *never* fully representative, and thus a class always arises asserting something like "these dominating interests and ideologies are not representative of our universal condition! We could have a society free from the shackles of ideology!" However, as the dust settles, if the revolutionary class becomes the new elite, Marx argues that (no matter how pure their intention) they too are necessarily in the position to give form to *what* the universal condition is, and this positive articulation is necessarily particular (interest driven), and the cycle starts again.

In Marx's words,

> For each new class which puts itself in the place of the one ruling before it is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to present its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones. (1998, 68)

Interesting for the Corsican struggle is Marx's argument that the revolutionary impulse *itself* is, in a sense, the closest humans come to the "universality" that ideologies constantly corrupt. He argues that the revolutionary impulse

> can be representative of the whole of society, as the whole mass of society confronting the one ruling class. It can do this because initially its interest really is as yet mostly connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes, because under the pressure of hitherto existing conditions its interest has not yet been able to develop as the particular interest of a particular class. (1998, 69)

This notion—that in the revolutionary negation of ideology one has a glimpse of the "classless" truth of one's own condition—resonates with the Corsican situation, where over the past 35 years militants have remained in what we could consider a

perpetual cycle of revolt against themselves. Passion is renewed each time codification of the tradition proves insufficient, only to be codified again—Anto's abandoned mountain village, the patrimoine immaterial, Jean-Pierre's videos, become new frames, arising out of the passionate feeling that this time they've got it!

From a certain point of view, the Corsican militants' continued and passionate belief in the existence of their "authentic" condition, despite their inability to locate it definitively, could look unreasonable and contradictory. However, the character of the cycle, of passionate conviction followed by disillusion followed by renewed conviction, is in fact revealing of the "reality" which they hope to assert. When we realize this, the difficulties Corsicans face trying to articulate their authentic condition do not undermine what they are trying to indicate, but actually evoke it.

For Marx, the communist solution is meant to be one in which a class arises in which the universal character embodied in the revolutionary instinct remains unparticularized, uncodified, and thus true to itself. Corsicans have not embraced the particularities of the communist solution, although the longing at the heart of their struggle is strongly sympathetic with Marx's. It is important, however, *not* to suggest that the Corsicans have, through this endless, cyclical, struggle, somehow figured out how to embody the universality of their condition without corrupting it, that they have achieved the kind of deep re-unification that Marx seems to be after. Rather, for the Corsican militant, this struggle is unstable, having the effect of pitting man against himself, as both alienator and alienated.

The Frankfurt School

One of the most problematic aspects of Marxist theory and arguably that which led his predictions of the downfall of the bourgeois state and the revolutions he anticipated to be wrong is the profound difficulty of conceiving, in a positive sense, what a classless society (a society with out classification, codification) would look like. What kind of human production would not fall prey to the dangers of classification, objectification, and codification, and the consequent condition of alienation?

In light of the failed communist project, a new line of scholarship, influenced by Marx's work, arose to consider this problem anew, in the writings of the Frankfurt school. In the 1930s, Adorno, Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, among others, looked critically at cultural and ideological structures, which they felt had been neglected by Marx himself. In specific, they looked at the relationship between art, culture and ideology in late capitalism, exploring the ways in which art, rather than being a neutral reflection of objective reality, is inseparable from genre, style, and ultimately, as the Marxists would say, this or that mode of production. By considering in particular the way ideals of the bourgeoisie infiltrate artistic production in late capitalism, these authors consider what, in contrast, art might look like in a classless society. What we see in their descriptions is reminiscent of what Corsican militants hope *true* paghjella singing can be.

The Frankfurt school critiques realist art, which, it is argued, suggests to the viewer that he is a passive recipient, contemplating an object that represents things as they are (and thus is deeply ideological). Benjamin argues that in realism what he calls the "aura" of art, a "strange web of space and time" or "a distance as close as it can be"(1973, 236), has been commodified. For Benjamin, reviving the aura of artistic

creation requires making art participatory. Participatory art would highlight the viewer's involvement in the mode of production itself, undermining the piece of art as bearer of the aura. This kind of art, Benjamin argues, would require emphasis on the intermittent and fragmentary character of production, in time. Corsicans' valorization of the participatory and fragmentary character of paghjella singing, and the way, as Coti put it in Chapter V, it "comes into being in a given place that corresponds to a given moment," is, perhaps, an example of what Benjamin is envisioning.

In his 1938 essay, "On the Fetish-character in Music and the Regression of Listening," Adorno emphasizes a related, though slightly different angle on art in a classless society, by critiquing the way in which music is listened to and experienced in late capitalism. His critique resonates with Jean-Pierre' critique of Corsican listeners above.

Adorno argues that art possesses the capability of offering the experience of an alternative kind wholeness, one that challenges the kind of totality modeled by the modern hegemonic state, in which the validity of the whole depends on the static, identifiable, fixed parts that can be said to be its essential building blocks. Adorno, in contrast to Benjamin, explicitly maintains the importance of the "whole" to which artistic production can refer, but the character of this "whole" is, like the essence discussed in the past few chapters, inherently elusive. Adorno criticizes music in which one delights in "the gay façade" for it

> become[s] an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole…The listener is converted along his line of least resistance… into the acquiescent purchaser…No longer do the partial moments serve as a critique of the whole…..Instead they suspend the critique, which the successful aesthetic totality exerts against the flawed one of society. (1991, 32)

For Adorno, the dissonance in music (and for Corsicans, also the mistakes) can actually serve as a kind of internal critique of the "whole," *without* destroying that whole. It is, in fact, the internal critique that allows for, what Adorno calls the "successful aesthetic totality." In the Maì Pesce rendition of the song Jean-Pierre played for me, the melodic moments of climax are pleasing and explosive, and this pleasure for the listener depends on the exclusion of dissonance, disjuncture, one could say, alterity. One is swept away by the sense that Mia Peche has "nailed it," once and for all, so to speak. In contrast, Adorno is suggesting something that Corsican militants seem to be insisting upon: that the dissonance and mistakes in a paghjella do not threaten its "wholeness." Rather they point beyond themselves to indicate it.

As the man sitting next to me at the abandoned village put it, "the Corsicans appreciate the mistakes, it shows that its *vivant* [living]." The mistakes point beyond the moment to the whole within which they are emerging, one that is authentically happening, then and there. In this sense, the vrai paghjella is able to assert itself as a whole and challenge that whole simultaneously. This process suggests an alternative kind of "wholeness" to the one proposed by the "state" (which is another way of saying the kind of wholeness proposed by Enlightenment rationalism, see Chapter IV). This alternative kind of wholeness is, I believe, what Coti is trying to indicate when he talks about the "inaccessible" at the heart of the Corsican versu. To quote him again,

> this *volonté de l'être, u versu,* is something that is in itself truly inaccessible…by 'inaccessible,' I don't mean the ordinary meaning of 'access,' as though there is a road to drive to get to *u versu* but we can't find it. ... When we talk about *u versu* as something inaccessible, what we are talking about is an 'access' that one can never get to…it signifies *outside* of reach. Really, the inaccessible.

That one cannot (ever) simply indicate the "whole" at stake for Adorno or for the Corsicans, as a positive, objective phenomenon, piece by piece, note by note, *does not* mean that it does not exist. This would *only* be the case *if* one was positing a "whole" which is primarily, ontologically, independent, outside of the processes of its becoming. Ultimately, it is this sense of an objective reality, above and beyond the process of becoming that the Corsicans and the Frankfurt school want to expose as deeply problematic and pervasive.

It is important to note here, in light of the previous arguments, a problem with the logic that theorists employ when they conclude that "essentialist" beliefs in the "whole" or the "real"/ "authentic" are invalid, or at least, that they do not indicate what they purport to. Often, as seen in Chapter IV, these arguments insist that when we look on the ground, we are unable to identify the consistent and homogeneous constituents of the "wholes" being claimed; and based on this we discount their pretention to "Truth." Interestingly, this pervasive mode of logic is a reinstantiation of, rather than a challenge to, the essentialism or holism implied by Enlightenment rationalism.

Bergson and Heidegger

At first blush, the Corsican militants' rejections of the codification of the vrai tradition, and their call for a return to the experiential, emergent, and contingent, looks very much like theories of "reality" that argue for the primacy of a pre-categorical, pre-theoretical, "raw" condition, which is misconstrued because of the human (particularly scientific) propensity to categorize. Phenomenology argues that, to access the "authentic," condition of things, we have to resist the categorical and privilege the experiential.

A powerful figure in this tradition of thought, whose theories speak directly to the Corsican sentiment that the vrai tradition is experienced as nonreplicable, and emergent, is Henri Bergson. In *Time and Free Will* (1889) and in *Duration and Simultaneity* (1922), Bergson critiques time understood as a scientifically measurable medium (what he calls "*temps"*). Bergson argues that the notion of time as something countable, which he suggests has dominated Western thought, since Aristotle, is problematic because it implies that time is made up of homogeneous units. "The idea of number implies the simple intuition of a multiplicity of parts or units, which are absolutely alike (1910, 76). While homogeneity is a property of countable time, he argues that this masks a fundamental feature of time as such, which exists pre-theoretically and pre-categorically. What he calls "pure temporality" or *durée,* is defined by its "irreducible mobility and novelty" such that "if a thought or feeling occurs again, it is by no means the same feeling, due to the interval between instances" (Massey 2005, 24).

This clearly resonates with Marie-Cécile's concerns in the last chapter, in which she says "The traditions are totally bound to space…to time…to the specificity of the land. By standardizing them, they made the traditions something consumable apart from the space or time, apart from the specific...." In the vrai tradition, a song is not experienced as the "same" as one sung with a similar melody in a previous time, precisely because, as Bergson puts it, it is not the *same* because it is occurring in a new instance.

Bergson argues that to become measurable, the flow or outpouring of durée has to be made static. This is a process in which time becomes understood as a virtual space where the homogenized moments can be put on a linear and flat directional trajectory,

conceived of "spatially." Bergson rejects a vision of time as a linear string of units or objects, rather than "a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another" what he calls, "pure heterogeneity"(1910, 104). [liv]

Where ostensibly, Corsican militants are also calling for a return to the immediacy of experiential time, when we look closely, unlike Bergson's vision, their conception of authenticity is not simply one of "pure heterogeneity," each moment utterly different from the next. This is revealed because what is pleasing and powerful about the tradition, for the Corsican militants, is the sentiment that this heterogeneity points to something beyond itself—the *here and nowness* of the moments themselves—which is not reducible to the qualitative particularities. This is seen perhaps most clearly in the problems with Jean-Pierre's pursuit of collecting every paghjella *ever.*

Without suggesting a theory of experience on the Corsicans' behalf, which they certainly have not elaborated, the tension they experience when they try to indicate pre-theoretical, pre-codified experience and can't help but corrupt it by codifying it, sheds important light on the shortcomings of Bergson's phenomenology of time. These shortcomings are elaborated in Heidegger's critique of Bergson.

As Massey puts it in *The Persistence of the Past: Heidegger and Bergson on Time*, "Bergson thinks that by emphasizing the homogeneity of space and contrasting it with the heterogeneity of pure duration, he can overturn the dominant mode of representation of time…[and] distance duration from homogeneity as radically as he thinks philosophers have distanced time from heterogeneity"(2005, 175). Heidegger argues that understanding time to be a string of heterogeneous "nows" rather than a string of "homogeneous" ones does not solve the problem. According to Heidegger, Bergson's

durée actually preserves something like the spatialized ideal of time that he purports to overcome. The string of directional nows are just qualitatively rather than quantitatively bound.

In contrast, Heidegger suggests, in an argument of much more detail than we can explore here, that the problem lies in how one conceives of the "now" itself.[lv] He argues that the "now" "has dimension in itself," stretching out towards the 'no-longer' and the 'not-yet,' and therefore, that the "now as such is already in transit" (1982, 248).

The human experience of being "here and now," which I have argued Corsican militants seem to link to their notion of authenticity and essence of their condition, is always an experience of partiality. Anto feels as he is singing that he is on a precipice, not knowing exactly what will emerge, compelled towards the "yet to be realized." Anto extends himself and his attention excitedly towards the unknowable. He attends to this "unknowable," yearning for "*what* will come next?" giving it a form in his longing, a "*what*," the absence of which actually defines it. It is the meditation on something that does *not-yet* exist as a constitutive feature of the authentic existence that is at stake here. In the very character of the longing, the "yet to be determined" has *already* been objectified. In other words, the Corsican militants' struggle to capture the authenticity *before* it is objectified, and their inability to do so, is not as sign of the perpetual alienation of humans from their authentic condition, but rather an indication that the authentic condition lies in the longing itself.[lvi]

Bourdieu

Over the past half century, Bourdieu's praxis theory has arguably been as influential for anthropological scholarship as Marxism has been. Bourdieu argues that

the scientific approach to culture has tended to draw spatial and temporal boundaries around "cultures" and mis-represent them as static phenomena.

> The detemporazlizing effect…that science produces when it forgets the transformation it imposes on practices inscribed in the current of time… simply by totalizing them, is never more pernicious than when exerted on practices defined by the fact that their temporal structure, direction, and rhythm are *constitutive* of their meaning. (1977, 9)

This resonates with the Corsicans' arguments I've described in which it is suggested that the temporal structure and, we could say, rhythm of life, has been masked by riacquistu production, itself based in scientific modes of investigation and analysis. Where Bourdieu breaks from the earlier theorists cited in this chapter is in what he thinks these totalizing explanations mask about culture and reality. For Bourdieu, the categorical does not, as Bergson suggests, mask the authentic and essentially heterogeneous character of pre-theoretical, "raw" experience. And, where Bourdieu may echo Heidegger, insofar as he seems to be after the way in which universalistic views of reality mask *why* one is inclined towards these views in the first place (their conditions of production), his answer is quite different from Heidegger's.

Bourdieu wants to say that humans are always born into worlds that are already classified, codified, structured etc. Patterned behaviors, beliefs, moralities, ways of speaking and being, etc., are already there. But we misunderstand them when we grant them some kind of objective status. These ordinary ways of going on, which have the feeling of just being the "natural" way things are, are what he calls "habitus":

> Between the child and the world the whole group intervenes…with a whole universe of ritual practices and also of discourses…all structured in concordance with the principles of the corresponding habitus…through acts and symbols that are intended to contribute to the reproduction of nature and of the group…produce in agent's temporary reactions…or even lasting dispositions…attuned to the objective processes expected from the

ritual action…to make the world conform to the myth. (1977, 167)

Bourdieu argues that it is people's adherence to these pre-existing structures in their own modes of speech, behavior etc., in their *practice,* that secure the "structures," outside the individual's experience of them. In a sense, practical mastery *itself* is the source of the structuring structures of habitus, and it is just this that we misunderstand when we attribute to the structures some independent or privileged status.

Further, Bourdieu argues that the human inclination to think that the way the world presents itself is indicative of something "real" or "authentic" is "learned ignorance"(1977, 19). It is precisely because we can't see the contingency of our "natural" worlds that they secure themselves, in a sense "objectively." Bourdieu calls this the "doxatic relation" people have to the social world, namely "the absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through the misrecognition of arbitrariness" (1997, 169). It is due to this doxic relation that spontaneous, "natural" ways of being in the world, engendered by ritual practice, are utterly taken for granted, and their arbitrariness is hidden.

He suggests that it is only, faced with *heterodoxy,* which he defines as "heresy—made possible by the existence of competing possibles"(169), that the "arbitrary principles of the prevailing classification…appear as such." When other "possibles" reveal themselves in heterodoxy, the elite must "undertake the work of conscious systematization and express rationalization"(169) of "reality as such" in efforts to "restore the primal state of innocence of doxa"(169). For Bourdieu, this marks the passage from doxa to *orthodoxy.* Orthodoxy is that which controls and censors practice in the name of the authentic or the real.

The resonance with Marx here is clear. Bourdieu's vision of the doxic relation being exposed as contingent and weakened when a competing possible asserts itself is no different from Marx's vision in which the elite ideology is called into question in light of the revolutionary impulse. For Bourdieu, the elite resists by trying to restore its own ideology's claim to universality, through orthodoxy.

However, for Marx, as argued earlier in this chapter, the cycle Bourdieu identifies is indicative of a deep tension constitutive of the human condition, the solution to which can only come in the form of a radical transformation, something like a new world order. And, as explored in Adorno and Heidegger, the idea of a "new world order" is itself undermined, because it is a misunderstanding of the very conditions of production that make conceiving a "reality" possible, conditions which are themselves indistinguishable from the way in which the real, the here and now, the authentic, reaches out, longs for itself.

Bourdieu, does not move towards these insights, which I have argued are importantly indicative of what is at stake for Corsicans themselves. This is, I think, because Bourdieu externalizes (objectifies) the tension that Marx and Heidegger begin with, falling into the very trap they predict. Rather than seeing the relations between doxa (the naive adherence to the "reality" of the world), heterodoxy (the recognition of doxa as partial, in light of other possibles, and therefore insufficient) and orthodoxy (the compulsion to validate "reality" through articulation, codification, etc.), as revealing of what "reality" is, Bourdieu particularizes them and grants them a kind of independence, in the form of groups, classes, driven by the desire for socio-economic power.

The doxa, heterodoxy, orthodoxy cycle that Bourdieu articulates arises out of the "officializing strategies" of individuals, which he describes as strategies to "transmute 'egoistic,' private, particular interests...into disinterested, collective, publicly avowable, legitimate interests"(40). He argues that these interests are "individuals or groups…striving to reproduce or improve their position in the social structure"(71).

For Bourdieu, the "class interest" that leads groups to institutionalize notions of the "objective" or the "authentic" has an identifiable, "objective" source, which is itself *not* subject to the doxa cycle: "an economy, i.e. as a system governed by the laws of interested calculation, competition, or exploitation"(172).

As a consequence, Bourdieu's main goal, which many anthropologists have adopted, is to show that the doxic relation, or people's "naïve adherence to the world," (19) is an illusion, deeply embedded by practice, as determined by those in power, driven by self-interest. This process of revelation is meant to pull the veil back, so to speak, so we can see "reality" as it really is, governed by self-interest, competition and exploitation.

That Bourdieu reinstates a vision of the real as the ontological basis for his praxis dialectic is clearly problematic given the terms he has set up, but perhaps of more concern is his claim that notions of the objectively real arise simply because things "go without saying because they come without saying"(167).

The question that the struggle experienced by the Corsican militants raises is: do things *ever* come and go "without saying"? In other words, is the human conviction that there is a *real* way things are simply a matter of the content of that "real way" being passed along unreflectively? Or, is the conviction of the "real" always imbued with the

kind of partiality discussed in Heidegger's notion of the "now"? If the "real" is compelling not only because of its giveneness but also its persistent not-yet-givenness, then an understanding of heterodoxy as independent from doxa as independent from orthodoxy greatly simplifies the way in which the "authentic" or the "real" simultaneously presents itself, represents itself, and all the while eludes representation.

Bourdieu's influence in anthropology has been substantial, and has led anthropologists down a path that tends to explain passionate claims about the "authenticity" or "essential reality" of a group's identity or tradition, as indicative of power relations in society—who has the power to impose their vision of the real, what are competing heterodoxic visions that threaten it, how is it reinforced through practices of orthodoxy. The defacto premise of this line of investigation is that these claims about "authenticity" or "essence" are invalid in so far as they do not indicate what they claim to be indicating. From a Bourdieuian perspective, it is held that people adhere to ideas of authenticity and essence either because of what they stand to gain from the ideas, or because they are ignorant of where the ideas come from.

I have suggested that this not only greatly misunderstands (and from my point of view vastly underestimates) what the Corsicans are struggling with, but it also reveals a vitally depleted understanding of "essence" and "essentialism" at work in much anthropological work today.

[li] The list of definitions of intangible heritage used by various member states suggest that that the kind of essence Corsicans are after resonates with cultural groups across the globe. The definitions also indicate the presence of the tension seen on Corsica between

the belief in a certain kind of cultural essence and the difficulty (impossibility) of simply pinning down what that essence is.

For example, on the one hand, many of the member states, in keeping with Unesco's own definition, highlight, relatively un-problematicly, the untouchable character of aspects of the immaterial heritage, as Ethiopia does,

> Cultural Heritage that cannot be felt by hands but can be seen or heard and includes different kinds of performances and show, folklore, religious, belief, wedding and mourning ceremonies, music, drama, literature and similar other cultural values, traditions and customs of nations, nationalities and peoples.

Definitions of this sort, however, are complemented by those in which the tensions described on Corsica reveal themselves. Indonesia's definition reads,

> It [immaterial heritage] is something that is inherited from the ancestor that cannot be touched or grasped especially by the mind...

Myanmar's definition reads,

> Tangible cultural is the material aspect and intangible culture is the spiritual aspect of life.

And there are those member states that express a convenient hybrid definition that identify practices included in the immaterial heritage, and allude to the difficulty of pinning it down. Austria's definition reads,

> Folk culture is the entirety of handed-down cultural expressions of specific regions, developing out of tradition. It is tied to community and tradition and dependent on life sphere and conditions of time.
> http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00001

[lii] http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=34325&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

[liii] It is important here not to suggest that Marx thinks that there is a human "essence," the "species being" that is universally expressed throughout history. Rather, for him, it is the mode of production of the historical moment that determines the character of that species being. For Marx, the character of man's "production" will determine the character of his universality, and not the other way around. He argues, "it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness"(1988, 43).

[liv] It is important to note that in recent years, particularly in light of the "crisis of representation" in anthropology (see Chapter IV), what can be considered a "phenomenological" focus on the experiential has emerged in the field. The static, categorical, overly-theoretical stance of the ethnographer has been opposed to the dynamic, heterogeneous, experiential stance of the native (Crapanzano 1986, Clifford 1983, Marcus 1980, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Asad 1986, Rabinow 1986, Rosaldo 1986, Jacobs-Huey 2002). The categories that were traditionally invoked by anthropologists to make sense of cultural realities were largely rejected as "invented artifact[s] of anthropology's theoretical projects and literary practices… a…conventional idiom, constructed rather than discovered"(Brightman 1995, 515). And, the "experiential," which it was argued had too long been understood as derivative of the categorical, was recentered.

This movement in anthropology is not, strictly speaking, phenomenological, but as Katz and Csordas (2003) put it, "For the most part, any anthropologist concerned in the least with the category of 'experience' is likely to claim to be doing, or be identified by others as doing, phenomenology; and the adjectives experiential and phenomenological are in effect synonymous"(4).

[lv] For more see, *Being in Time* (1962) on "temporal horizon," Pp. 350-382.

[lvi] This clearly resonates with Sartre's distinction between two kinds of being: the in-itself (*en-soi*) and the for-itself (*pour-soi*) in *Being and Nothingness* (1956). As Barrett puts it (1962), Sartre's vision of being-in-itself is "the self-contained being of a thing. A stone is a stone; it is what it is; and in being just what it is, no more and no less, the being of the thing always coincides with itself"(239). This is in contrast to "being-for-itself" which is "coextensive with the realm of consciousness, and the nature of consciousness is that it is perpetually beyond itself"(239). In a sense, Corsican militants are struggling to exist at the intersection of these two modes of being—to reflect on the simple in-itself "facticity" of their condition without corrupting it through the transcendence of consciousness. Their inability to do this reveals what Sartre considers the ontological root of our alienation as well as our freedom. As he puts it, we are "condemned to be free"(1956, 415).

Conclusion

I have suggested that the Corsican struggle for self-identification is revealing of a vision of cultural "essence" or "authenticity" that lies outside the typical anthropological critique of these notions. As we have just seen, according to Pierre Bourdieu's highly influential theory of practice, human notions of essence or authenticity—notions that there is some *way* the world *really* is—are thought to be a result of the seductive veil of doxa, which is secured through practice itself. With a clear debt to Marxist philosophy, Bourdieu's goal is, in a sense, to reveal the role of ideology in humans' relations to reality. No matter how "real" or "true" one's sense of her own world is, this sense, Bourdieu argues, is a result of "learned ignorance," or put more kindly, false-consciousness, not a reflection of some foundational, primordial, or essential "Truth".

From this point of view, anthropological arguments often strive to show that there is no way the world *is,* but *ways*—multiple, competing, and contesting—that worlds *are*. In a sense, anthropologists today act as a source of heterodoxy, working to reveal "other possibles" and, by doing so, pulling back the veil of doxa. In practical terms, this amounts to revealing the inherent diversity of practice, language, belief, etc. in order to destabilize overly totalistic visions of culture, which, it is argued, hold inhabitants of cultures (and arguably the academy itself) captive.

A prime site for this line of argument has been in the anthropological study of nationalist movements or movements for ethnic or cultural renewal, social movements launched explicitly in the name of a group's "essential" or "authentic" identity, like the Corsican riacquistu. This is for two main reasons. First, people in these movements insist publicly and passionately on the existence of their essential cultural identity, and

anthropologists are presented with the opportunity to reveal in particular, grounded cases, the ways in which ideological claims about essential identity *do not* describe the realities they claim to.

Second, scholars have argued that a particularly powerful (and dangerous) kind of ideology of group identity has flourished under the influence of Enlightenment rationalism. Specifically, it is argued that nation-state ideology, which has taken hold globally since the 18th century, gains its currency by basing the "reality" of the group on seemingly indisputable rationalist grounds—proving that the constitutive elements of group (language, ethnic and cultural traits, etc.) are stable and homogenous. Anthropologists, by revealing the ideological and contingent basis of the claimed "constitutive" cultural elements, call the reign of rationalist thought, in general, into question.

While there is no doubt that this anthropological preoccupation with revealing difference and alterity is a vitally important pursuit, I have suggested that the logic typically invoked as the indisputable basis for undermining essentialist claims, or recasting them as constructions in all cases, requires revisiting. As we have seen, the Corsican case gives us cause to rethink this framework's ability to explain the riacquistu and potentially other ethnic and nationalist movements of this sort around the world. The anthropological framework begins with the premise that group claims about essence equal claims about homogeneity. The evidence on Corsica suggests strongly that this is not always the case. The Corsican cultural militants I studied are as critical of standardized, homogenized representations of Corsican culture and identity as

anthropologists themselves are. What is interesting, however, is the way in which the two critiques of overly codified, homogenized cultural representations differ.

One *could* argue, in the vein of Handler's arguments about the Québécois and Herzfeld's arguments about the Greeks, and many other anthropological works of this sort (Foster 1991, Fox 1990, Linnekin 1991, Billing 1995), that the problem with riacquistu grammar books, the standardized singing repertoire, glossy museum displays, etc. is that they mask the actual heterogeneity of the culture on the ground, in favor of an ideological construction of Corsicanness. This is not, however, the primary line of criticism given by Corsican militants.

I have argued that for many Corsican militants, the diversity—the variation and mistakes in paghjella singing, the inconsistency and differentiation of Corsican cheese, the variability in pierre séche walls—does not prove that cultural essence has no objective status or that it is the result of imagining and construction. On the contrary, for the Corsicans, the differentiation bears witness to the *reality* of that essence. Corsicans' belief in cultural essence, and in a larger sense, in the reality or authenticity of their condition, does *not* wane when they see that empirical instances don't fit into the standardized model.

I believe that this difference between anti-essentialism in anthropology and heightened essentialism among Corsican militants can be explained in light of the very different notions of "essence" that Corsicans and anthropologists are invoking. For Corsicans, the "essence" or "authenticity" they are compelled by is not based on the homogeneity, fixity, or purity of the elements that constitute their culture, language, or tradition. And it therefore cannot be deconstructed by theories that try to reveal those

things as constructed. The prevalence of publications that define and valorize the vrai tradition, or recipe books of the traditional Corsican cuisine, or musical performances of the oral repertoire; such cultural products are not problematic for militants because they hide the *diversity* on the ground but because they hide the "authenticity" or "reality" of cultural production. And this authenticity is inseparable from its emergence in *actual* moments. The authentic culture that Corsicans are concerned with is more than the sum of its identifiable parts (whether the parts are standardized or differentiated). The authenticity or reality that they are after is one that pulses with the here and now, announces itself to be a unique set of conditions, which never has and never will come into being in exactly that way again. The spontaneity of an event is thought to capture this character of reality while events that are orchestrated mask it. Cultural objects and processes that bear the unique conditions of their production are thought to reveal this character of reality, while those that are overly standardized mask it.

Thus, heterogeneity is important for Corsicans, not because it undermines cultural essence, but because it points beyond itself to the non-standardizable conditions in which culture comes into being in real cases. This difference recalls the conflict between Bergson's and Heidegger's understandings of time, outlined in the previous chapter. Both philosophers agree that standardized, measurable time misses something fundamental about the phenomenon of actual time. Bergson argues that the standardization of time makes what is actually a stream of qualitative difference into a string of homogenous units, imposing uniformity on the inherently un-uniform. This is not unlike the anthropological insistence that homogenizing frames mask inherent diversity of cultural realities.

Heidegger, however, argues that Bergson's notion of a stream of qualitative difference is *also* problematic because, though it challenges the homogeneity of each unit of time, it continues to conceive of each moment, each here and now, as a *given* state of qualitative affairs. One could hypothetically take a snap shot of qualitative difference making up each moment, string them together, blur the edges and have an accurate representation of Bergson's "durée". This is, as we saw, a version of what Jean-Pierre is trying to do by recording every instance of pagjhella singing.

Heidegger complicates this notion by arguing that what the "here and now" amounts to, bearing strong resemblance to the Corsican idea of authentic emergence in real time and space, is *never fully given*. It is inherently partial. We saw this, in particular, in the paghjella singing sessions in which a singer feels powerfully present as he attends to what is coming. Attending to the "what" that is coming, to that which is not yet known, floods the singer with a sensation of being in the here and now, on the precipice, as the real is unfolding naturally, spontaneously, right here and now.

This is not different than Heidegger's understanding of "ecstatic" character of the now, or the actual (1962). Here, ecstatic means literally outside of itself. (Etymologically from the Greek, *ek*: out, and *stasis*: place). The authenticity of vrai paghjella singing does not lie in its ability to reveal the *givenness* of the here and now (all the empirical details of the situation at hand) to participants, but in its power to confront participants with the inherent *non-givenness* or partiality that each moment brims with.

Understanding the Corsican preoccupation with what cultural activist Rinatu Coti called the "inaccessible" or what the traditional singer Acquiviva called the "perpetual search for an equilibrium that you can never attain" suggests an alternative to a

Bourdieuan analysis of *why* humans are compelled by beliefs in the real or essential character of their condition, despite the fact that empirical evidence shows time and again that there is no integral cultural object. Rather than a sign of human ignorance, we can understand these beliefs to be a product of the human encounter with a valid and universally true element of reality as such—that it is never fully given.

From this point of view, particular articulations of essential reality (ideologies) are problematic because they necessarily give form to what is by its nature "informal"; they claim to lay bare, once and for all, the condition of the real, and in doing so, make "given" something that is inherently not given. This is a version of the struggle that many of today's Corsican militants are plagued by. Similarly, for theorists such as Adorno and Benjamin, their project has in large part been the consideration of this elusive character of Reality and the best way to build into representation itself an indication or reminder of the partiality it was born to announce. These theorists are concerned with the essential non-givenness of reality as such. This is *vitally* different from the dominant trajectory that anthropology has taken, in which the non-given character of the real is frequently misunderstood and used as evidence of their being *no "*reality as such" to speak of.

The irony is that when anthropologists argue that the heterogeneity, differentiation, or flux of culture discovered on the ground undermines the possibility of an "authentic" or "essential" cultural reality, built into this argument is the unspoken premise that "essence" or "authenticity" of a culture could *only* be proven true if empirical conditions *were* standardized, homogenous, fixed, etc. In a backwards way, these anti-essentialist stances reinforce the very Enlightenment notions of truth production that they hope to contest.

Equally problematically, this anti-essentialist premise leaves anthropologists with a loose end. Given the "unsubstantiated" character of essentialist beliefs, we must then explain *why* they exist (so persistently) in human societies. To tie up this loose end, under the influence of Bourdieu's theory and a certain reading of Marx, it is frequently held that the source of such ideological beliefs is self-interest, competition, and exploitation. Thus, once we have proven that ideological constructions of reality are not grounded in empirical fact, we pull back the veil of doxa to show the economies of power that are instantiating them. In one fell swoop, a positivist understanding of "reality" slips in the back door, and the provocative insight about the inherent partiality of reality is replaced by an explanation that, like Mia Peche's produced and polished rendition of the Corsican traditional song, nails it once and for all.

The Bourdieuan line of argument I have described generally conceives of itself as offering a new epistemological horizon, in which the dominance of Enlightenment Rationalism, and the vision of a world that can be rendered in its totality through scientific and analytic means, is challenged. While ethnographies influenced by this line of argument have successfully revealed diversity, heterogeneity, multi-vocality, etc., they have *not* broken from the influence of Enlightenment rationalism. They have, in fact, reinforced it. And ironically, it is possible that groups insisting passionately and often violently on the existence of their own authenticity and essence are actually the ones reaching beyond the Enlightenment legacy. We not only risk misunderstanding what they are up to, but also eclipsing the real epistemological insight that they offer up.

Corsica Today

In Corsica, where the protagonists of the riacquistu are also its greatest critics, the tone of Corsican militants' struggle and frustration is often one of regret rather than contestation. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the Corsican militancy. If militants' frustrations were directed outward at another group who could be accused of misrepresenting Corsican identity for certain ends, it would have been easy to fall into the line of Bourdieuan argument I have just outlined. Because the frustration is directed inward, however, a powerful vision of "authenticity" and "reality" at odds with categorical representation has surfaced.

This inward critique leads to the seemingly endless cycle of articulation and criticism, conviction and disappointment, which I have described. It is important to note that, in no way am I holding Corsica up as an example of a group that has heightened awareness of the true nature of authenticity, essence or identity. Their struggle is defined as much by dissatisfaction and alienation as it is by insight and conviction. However, due to the way this movement has doubled back on itself, it is particularly revealing.

The struggle experienced by these Corsican militants in this movement for cultural reacquisition and the quest for the Real that it provokes is revealing of a struggle that shows up in all human societies, but *not* because human constructions of reality are inherently ideological and underscored with self interest, but because of what reality *is,* or I should say, is *not yet*. From this point of view, the longing that the Corsicans feel to close the gap between their codifications of the tradition and the real tradition, will show up everywhere in some form, because the relevance and meaningfulness of ordinary worlds depends on their being encountered, not as a self-evidence, but as a precipice.

While the universality of this authentic condition has been worked out (not unproblematically) in the theories of Marx, Heidegger, and other (particularly) postmodern scholars, on Corsica a version of it is accessible in a particularly ordinary form, reminding us in a powerful way that the tension explored by these theorists does not belong to them or primarily to the realm of theory. The "species being" that Marx describes, Heidegger's ecstatic character of the now*,* Adorno's successful aesthetic totality—these are efforts to indicate a character of reality that does not lie above or beyond ordinary worlds, but surges through them, making them pulse with relevance and meaning.

The Corsican militants I spent 14 months accompanying, interviewing, sharing conversation and meals with were not uniformly critical of riacquistu representations, nor did they identify the problem with the riacquistu in identical or even consistent ways. For example, I believe that Jean-Pierre is passionate about his project to video all paghjellas as they come into being, but I also believe, given the other things he's told me, that he cannot resolve his anxieties about the tradition through this mode of cultural production. But only time will tell how or if this tension will resolve. And on certain days, Anto insisted with exuberance that I *must* come to a mountain gathering because the tradition was going to be the real thing. On other days, however, he would rant about how I could not *possibly* understand the vrai tradition, which is something lived not watched. There were days that I felt that the militant efforts were remarkably noble. The unwavering conviction and belief that they expressed—a belief in the real or the authentic that came from their guts not from longwinded arguments or descriptions—was impressive and inspiring. And yet, there were other days that it felt tragic, as if their determination to

close the gap between the representation and the real was so dogged it had made it impossible for them to delight in the inevitable space between the two, the space where poetry, aesthetics, humor (as well as ideology) flourish.

Corsica is not a utopia of the "here and now." It is, however, a culture that is actively considering the value and legitimacy of encounters with the "here and now" in contrast with the value and legitimacy of codified and standardized truths. And, it is a culture that is struggling with the ways in which one genre of truth inevitably seems to arise from the other, and continually threaten to obscure the other. This makes Corsica an important place to reconsider what nationalist or ethnic movements preoccupied with their essential identity might be expressing. It is, of course, not only on Corsica where there are groups of people who feel there is something fundamental, essential, and authentic about their realities and identities that the dominant modes of articulating, codifying, and legitimizing reality and identity do not make room for. When we as anthropologists hear voices exclaiming with passion (and frustration or anger), "We are real! We are authentic!" and assume immediately that these claims are problematic assertions of homogeneity and cultural purity, we encroach even more, make even less room, for people to meaningfully assert the reality and truth of their own existences. Given that I have argued that a version of this kind of assertion is an inevitable aspect of *all* human society, when we try to harness it or tame it (or even dismiss it) through analyses that cast these beliefs as constructions or imaginings, we may not only misunderstand what people are going on about, but actually exacerbate the feeling that they can not be heard, and the need to say it louder and more passionately.

On the night before we left Corsica, we bundled up in our winter coats, filled a bowl with chocolate chip cookies just out of the oven, and walked through the windy back alleys of the village, knocking on every door, sitting down with every family, exchanging gifts, bisous, and goodbyes. It was amazing to me how open and amicable each one of these interactions was. And, it occurred to me how relieved the villagers must have been, in a certain sense, that we were leaving. On the one hand, we were now real friends with so many of them, (not to mention the fact that our foreignness always brought excitement and often entertainment to the village). On the other hand, we were hard to deal with. We weren't really family, and in terms of social currency (at least on the island) we would almost certainly do more harm than good over the long term. However, faced with our departure, it was as though the pressure lifted, and people just gave us what we had been longing for. David and I joked that, on that last night, we felt so embraced by the village, it might make us forget how difficult things could be. Maybe we'd move back there someday.

I left troubled by what will become of the Corsican movement for cultural reacquisition. Will this liminal state of frustration and confusion continue endlessly? Will it bank in one direction or another—towards the museum display version of Corsican culture on the one hand, or towards a disinterest in identity articulation altogether, on the other? And, what would be "best" for them? I also left with dozens of notebooks overflowing with notes, descriptions and interviews. I had recordings and videos of paghjella singing circles, pictures of all kinds of events I'd participated in, and a suitcase full of pamphlets, books, articles, clippings, and brochures. I had a lot of stuff.

I had information. I could not answer these questions definitively, but I could describe the complexities, the stakes, the voices. On the one hand.

On the other hand, I had a son who was now a year older and thought that it was "normal" to open a window and see stunning mountain scapes and houses crumbling into each other like rock formations; who often imitated paghjella singers, holding his little hand up to his ear and warbling his voice; and who spoke French (at least as much as he spoke English). This was not information that he was leaving with, packed away like the notes in my suitcase, not experiences that he would relate when he got home. This, in a sense, totally contingent foray into the worlds of Corsicans was now an utterly real part of who he was, and who David and I were. We are marked by that journey, just as we are marked by every moment of every day. But because it is called into relief, bounded by two winters and infused with unique sounds, smells, and sights, it has the power to remind us of this awesomely ordinary fact about our days and our lives.

Perhaps most importantly, I left infected by the Corsican militants' conviction: that cultural authenticity does exist, that reality is not an ideological construction, and even that the legitimacy of these convictions is something worth struggling to preserve. These insights are, as I have suggested, particularly important for our understandings of groups whose collective life has been consumed by the drive to assert their own essence. These insights are also important for the anthropological project, whose goal is to render human culture through ethnographic representation, and must build this struggle into those renderings if we are ever to capture on our pages the passion, conviction and meaning which people bring to their relations to reality as such. And, ultimately, these

insights are important to us as humans, as we all, at some level, yearn to know, once and for all, what is on the other side of the precipice.

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