



# ‘Je suis corse, un homme de village’: Towards a Study of Contemporary Corsican Nationalism (1959–98)

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## Abstract

This article reconstructs the genesis and developments of contemporary Corsican nationalism between 1959 to 1998, from the emergence of regionalism to the most dramatic phase of the resurgence of violence represented by the murder of Prefect Claude Érignac. The underlying hypothesis for this study is that Corsica embodies the community of destiny through a dialogue between tradition and modernity. With regard to permanency, what remains is a community and clan-oriented mentality with a lasting impact upon nationalism. The emergence of contemporary Corsican nationalism must be viewed from a dual perspective: on the one hand, as a traditional system reserved for members of certain families according to a clan-based approach; on the other, there is a protest movement that does not imply the dismantlement of the clan system but its renewal on the basis of criteria of democracy, equality and justice.

## I

The rise of nationalism in the early 1960s was a moment in which Corsicans gained an awareness of the existence of a perennial, primeval nation. The classical Herderian triad ‘people–country–language’<sup>1</sup> evokes an essential vision of nationalism based on the idea that the nation is engendered by primordial sentiments, that is, the existence of a sense of common belonging and of a shared heritage of symbols making the nation a ‘community of destiny’.<sup>2</sup>

The birth of the modern Corsican nationalist movement must be seen within a national context that was shaped by the events taking place in Algeria from the early 1960s onwards. In fact, the independence of Algeria in 1962 and the launch of the decolonisation process helped speed up the

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<sup>1</sup> Marco D’eramo, ‘Benedict Anderson: lo sguardo che ti spiazza’ *Storicamente*, 12 (2016), pp. 1–14, at p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Malden, 1986).

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emergence of regionalist movements<sup>3</sup> in Occitania<sup>4</sup> and in Brittany<sup>5</sup> as well as in Corsica. All of these movements aimed to revitalise regional languages as well as advance demands for self-determination. Corsica and Brittany saw the birth of clandestine movements (Fronte di liberazione nazionale di a Corsica [FLNC] and Front de Libération de la Bretagne, respectively) that used terrorist violence as an instrument to advance their political demands.

This article aims to reconstruct the genesis and developments of contemporary Corsican nationalism between 1959–98, from the emergence of regionalism to the most dramatic phase of the resurgence of violence represented by the murder of Prefect Claude Érignac. In the nationalist imaginary, the nation is something intrinsic. It is not a historic construct (as it would be if one adopted a constructivist approach) and is not therefore subject to the changes taking place to the extent to which, given that it is imagined by its own components, the latter is based on permanent negotiations.<sup>6</sup> From the perspective of essentialist nationalism, the Corsican people is a people to the extent to which it identifies with a community of destiny. This community includes everyone, Corsicans by birth or by adoption, who intends to pursue the common good by living and working on the island and honouring the Corsican language and culture by using them every day.<sup>7</sup>

To borrow the expression formulated by the Norwegian political scientist Stein Rokkan, Corsica, which had struggled to integrate itself into the French institutional context right from the start, took the shape of an 'insular interface periphery'. In other words, it was a peripheral region situated at the intersection of two countries, Italy and France.<sup>8</sup> Corsica developed a sub-state nationalism<sup>9</sup> that shared some features with the entities commonly described in the literature on nationalism as examples of sub-state nationalist movements in the Western world, that is, Québec, Catalonia, the Basque Country, Scotland, Wales, Flanders and Wallonia.<sup>10</sup> As Jan Erk has pointed out, the various sub-state nationalist movements are located in various positions along a left-right spectrum. For example, Scottish, Welsh and Québécois nationalism are all on the left while Catalan nationalism is often considered to be a right-wing Christian

<sup>3</sup> Arundhati Virmani, 'Regionalism in France' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 48 (1987), pp. 675–85.

<sup>4</sup> Fabien Nicolas, 'Identité partisane et revendication occitane. Pour en finir avec une absence en Midi rouge: le parti occitan' *Pôle Sud* 20 (2004), pp. 83–96.

<sup>5</sup> Sébastien Carney, 'Le mouvement breton au miroir de son historiographie' *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 123 (2016), pp. 83–106.

<sup>6</sup> Umut Özkirimli, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (Basingstoke, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Joshua A. Fishman, 'Language and nationalism', in Stuart Woolf (ed), *Nationalism in Europe: 1815 to the present. A Reader* (London, 1996), pp. 155–70.

<sup>8</sup> Stein Rokkan, *Stato, nazione e democrazia in Europa* (Bologna, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Peter Lynch, *Minority Nationalism and European Integration* (Cardiff, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Jan Erk, 'Sub-state nationalism and the left–right divide: critical junctures in the formation of nationalist labour movements in Belgium' *Nations and Nationalism*, 11 (2005), pp. 551–2.

Democrat movement. In Belgium, Flemish nationalism is right leaning, while the Walloon movement is on the left.<sup>11</sup>

Studies exploring the history of contemporary Corsican nationalism, with some exceptions,<sup>12</sup> have tended to adopt an essentialist vision when exploring this phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> In this study, we wish to go beyond the scope of these works by proposing an analysis of nationalism capable of interpreting this phenomenon through the lens of tradition and modernity.<sup>14</sup>

Literature on forms of sub-state nationalism suggests that they are essentially based on a primordial conception of nation. For a long time, territorial particularism was seen as a phenomenon of backwardness representing a serious obstacle to the process of modernisation. What emerges from this vision is an image of forms of sub-state nationalism as deeply anti-modern, conservative movements emphasising the existence of a unique identity based on cultural, religious, linguistic and historical aspects. And these particularisms clash with the spirit of modern nation states, which are founded on the affirmation of universal rights and of citizenship as well as on the respect for shared rules.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Emile Durkheim observed that ‘a people is as much more advanced as territorial divisions are more superficial’.<sup>16</sup> This line of reasoning remained dominant in the post-war period because it was a widespread opinion that economic development and growing modernisation would have led to the disappearance of territorial particularisms. It envisaged the triumph of universalistic principles and the rise of economic relations on a global scale that would have led to cultural uniformity throughout the state territory. However, this did not take place and instead there was a re-emergence of forms of sub-state nationalism between the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis placed on cultural traditions and on the importance of defending and promoting regional languages resulted in a renewed focus on the question of identity in the peripheral contexts of Western Europe.<sup>18</sup> A large number of expressions were used to define

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 552.

<sup>12</sup> See, by way of example, the works by Xavier Crettiez, *La Question Corse* (Bruxelles, 1999), Thierry Dominici, ‘Le nationalisme dans la Corse contemporaine’ *Pôle Sud*, 20 (2004), pp. 97–112; André Fazi, *La recomposition territoriale du pouvoir: les régions insulaires de Méditerranée occidentale* (Ajaccio, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Deborah Paci, ‘La “comunità immaginata” corsa (1974–1984). Il nazionalismo nello sguardo dei contemporanei’, in Andrea Geniola, Deborah Paci (eds.), *Sulle tracce della comunità immaginata. Identità e istituzioni nell’Europa degli stati nazionali* (Milan, 2022), pp. 63–83.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Louis Briquet, *La tradition en mouvement: clientélisme et politique en Corse* (Paris, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Eric John Ernest Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York, 1990); Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1995); Sanjay Jeram, ‘Sub-state Nationalism and Immigration in Spain: Diversity and Identity in Catalonia and the Basque Country’ *Ethnopolitics* 13 (2014), p. 228.

<sup>16</sup> Emile Durkheim, *On Morality and Society* (Chicago, 1973), p. 74.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Keating, *Nations Against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland* (Basingstoke, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Stein Rokkan, Derek W. Urwin, *Economy, Territory, Identity: Politics of West European Peripheries* (London, 1983).

this type of nationalism, including that of ethno-regionalism.<sup>19</sup> As Filippo Tronconi has suggested, it would be appropriate to make a terminological distinction: nationalism implies that the territory is equivalent to a space contained within the state borders, meaning that citizens from other states are considered to be foreigners. Unlike ethno-regionalism, the 'ethnic foreigner' 'also includes a part of the citizens of the home state, in particular, the élites of the 'colonizing' centre'.<sup>20</sup> This seems to be an appropriate term if we consider the rhetoric of the 'I francesi fora' slogan that appeared on the island scene in the 1960s and is still in use today. Nonetheless, we believe that the term sub-state nationalism is a particularly apt description of the dynamics distinguishing these peripheral realities.<sup>21</sup> This is partly because it refers to that whole range of rhetoric 'drawing upon a baggage of shared cultural or ethnic elements that have been recovered, recreated and often invented by groups in order to demand their right to self-determination and legitimize their mobilization'.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, it also presumes that 'the boundaries of the 'imagined community' [...] only comprise a restricted territory within the states to which they belong, against which the mobilisation is being aligned [...] The term nationalism allows us to recover all of these elements underpinning collective identity, without exclusively emphasising the ethnic factors'.<sup>23</sup>

The underlying hypothesis for this study is that Corsica embodies the community of destiny through a dialogue between tradition and modernity.<sup>24</sup> With regard to permanency, what remains is a community and clan-oriented mentality with a lasting impact upon nationalism.<sup>25</sup> The emergence of contemporary Corsican nationalism must be viewed from

<sup>19</sup> Lieven de Winter, Huri Tursan (eds), *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe* (London-New York, 1998); Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, 1994); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York, 1983); David Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism. Civic, Ethnocultural and Multicultural Politics* (London-New York, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Filippo Tronconi, *I partiti etnoregionalisti: la politica dell'identità territoriale in Europa occidentale* (Bologna, 2009), p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Marcel A. Farinelli, 'Managing the island territory: a historical perspective on sub-state nationalism in Corsica and Sardinia' *Small States & Territories*, 3 (2020), pp. 137–52; André Fazi, Luis de la Calle, 'Making Nationalists out of Frenchmen?: Substate Nationalism in Corsica' *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 16 (2010), pp. 397–419.

<sup>22</sup> Francesco Raniolo, *Partiti nazionalisti sub-statali e Unione Europea: i casi del Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG), della Lega Nord (LN) e dello Scottish National Party (SNP)* (Arcavacata di Rende, 2009), p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Janine Renucci, *Corse traditionnelle et Corse nouvelle. La géographie d'une île* (Lyon, 1974).

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of clanism and patronage in Corsica, see Francis Pomponi, 'Pouvoir et abus de pouvoir des maires corses au XIXe siècle' *Études rurales*, 63–4 (1976), pp. 153–69; Francis Pomponi, 'À la recherche d'un "invariant" historique: la structure clanique dans la société corse', in Max Caisson (ed), *Pievi è paesi, communautés rurales corses* (Paris, 1978), pp. 7–30; Georges Ravis-Giordani, 'L'alta pulitica et la bassa pulitica, valeurs et comportements politiques dans les communautés villageoises XIXe-XXe siècles' *Études rurales*, 63–4 (1976), pp. 171–89; Georges Ravis Giordani, *Bergers corses. Le communautés villageoises du Niolu* (Ajaccio, 1983); José Gil, *La Corse entre la liberté et la terreur: étude sur la dynamique des systèmes politiques corses* (Paris, 1984); Jean-Louis Briquet, *La tradition en mouvement: clientélisme et politique en Corse* (Paris, 1997); Jean-Louis Briquet, 'Le vote au village des Corses de l'extérieur. Dispositifs de contrôle et expressions

a dual perspective: on the one hand, as a traditional system reserved for members of certain families according to a clan-based approach; on the other, there is a protest movement that does not imply the dismantlement of the clan system but its renewal on the basis of criteria favouring democracy, equality and justice.<sup>26</sup> The infighting within the nationalist movement that led to the fratricidal war of the 1990s confirms the longue durée of clanism, its merging with nationalism and, at the same time, the relevance of the community.

## II

The beginnings of Corsican nationalism date to the Paoline period that saw the island experiencing a brief period of ‘quasi-independence’ in the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> In 1729, a group of men belonging to the upper class started a revolt against the Genoese rule, the ‘Corsican revolution’, which would last forty years.<sup>28</sup> In 1755, a constitutional charter resembling a representative constitution was drawn up and Pasquale Paoli was named president, or ‘general of the Corsican nation’. After various vicissitudes, the Republic of Genoa decided to transfer its sovereignty rights over the island to France.<sup>29</sup> In 1769, the Battle of Ponte Novu marked the end of Pasquale Paoli’s government and the beginning of French rule over Corsica.<sup>30</sup> With the exception of the short-lived Anglo-Corsican Kingdom (1794–6),<sup>31</sup> the island remained under the control of the French government despite unresolved problems relating to public order and the continuance of practices like that of the vendetta.<sup>32</sup>

In the wake of First World War, a regionalist movement emerged with the aim of safeguarding the Corsican language and culture, seeking greater autonomy and the establishment of a university on the island.<sup>33</sup>

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des sentiments (19e-20e siècles), *Revue française de science politique*, 66/5 (2016), pp. 751–71; Gérard Lenclud, ‘Des idées et des hommes: patronage électoral et culture politique en Corse’, *Revue française de science politique*, 38/5 (1988), pp. 770–82; Gérard Lenclud, ‘S’attacher: le régime traditionnel de la protection en Corse’, *Terrains*, 21 (1993), pp. 81–96; Sampiero Sanguinetti, *La Corse, entre clanisme et nationalisme* (Ajaccio, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Xavier Crettiez, André Fazi and Gérard Lenclud, ‘D’un passé aux possibles. Rencontre avec Gérard Lenclud’, *Vacarme*, 64/3 (2013), pp. 158–69, at p. 166.

<sup>27</sup> Fabrizio Dal Passo, *Il Mediterraneo dei lumi. Corsica e democrazia nella stagione delle rivoluzioni* (Naples, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Antoine-Marie Graziani, *La Corse génoise: économie, société, culture; période moderne 1453–1768* (Ajaccio, 1997); Michel Vergé-Franceschi, *Histoire de la Corse. Le pays de la grandeur* (Paris, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> Carlo Bitossi, *Il Regno di Corsica 1700–1768* (Genoa, 1997); Emiliano Beri, *Genova e il suo regno. Ordinamenti militari, poteri locali e controllo del territorio in Corsica fra insurrezioni e guerre civili (1729–1768)* (Novi Ligure, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Jean-Marie Arrighi, *Ponte Novu récits, mémoires et analyses (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)* (Ajaccio, 2019).

<sup>31</sup> Fabrizio Dal Passo, *Il Mediterraneo dei lumi. Corsica e democrazia nella stagione delle rivoluzioni*, p. 187.

<sup>32</sup> Gérard Lenclud, *En Corse. Une société en mosaïque* (Paris, 2012), pp. 164–215.

<sup>33</sup> Hyacinthe Yvia-Croce, *Vingt années de corsisme 1920–1939. Chronique corse de l’entre-deux guerres* (Ajaccio, 1979); Antoine Leca, *A Muvra ou le procès de la France par les autonomistes corses (1920–1939)* (Aix-en-Provence-Marseille, 1992); Antoine Leca, *A Muvra ou l’autonomisme corse de la réhabilitation de l’Italie à la tentation fasciste* (Aix-en-Provence-Marseille, 1993); Jean-Paul

In the 1930s, the Partitu Corsu d'Azione, attracted by the propaganda produced by Italian fascism, turned into a party seeking the island's unification with Mussolini's Italy.<sup>34</sup> In the period between the two wars, the Corsican panorama was dominated by the influence of two rival clans led by François Piétri, who was right-wing, and by Adolphe Landry, who had left-wing tendencies. In the 1940s, François Piétri was involved in collaborationism and was even an ambassador for the Vichy government in Francoist Spain.<sup>35</sup> Corsica, the first French department to be liberated, made a significant contribution to the Resistance.<sup>36</sup> It was then that Paul Giacobbi became, 'with the collapse of the "Piétri clan" [...], the natural successor to the "Republican legacy"'.<sup>37</sup> The period after Second World War saw the rise of the clans linked to the Gavini and de Rocca Serra families, on the right, and the clans of the Giacobbi family, who were radical republican.

It was not until 1955, that there were faint signs of the revival of regionalism, marked by the foundation that year of the bilingual French-Corsican newspaper *U Muntese* directed by Petru Ciavatti, followed by the birth of the Mouvement du 29 novembre in Ajaccio in 1959. The movement's name referred to the decree issued by the National Constituent Assembly on 30 November 1789 endorsing the island's annexation to the French State. Those identifying with the movement attacked the failure to integrate the island with France, putting forward sectoral demands regarding the maintenance of the railways or opposition to the creation of a base for nuclear experiments at Argenteella.<sup>38</sup> Several members of parliament expressed support for movements against the Argenteella project, as emerged from the appointment of the Comité de Ponte Novu, on 24 April 1960, which numbered several MPs including François Giacobbi, Roxanne Polidori, Charles Galletti, and Pierre-Paul Giacomini. This popular movement involved representatives from the traditional left-wing political class who were close to François Giacobbi. It is difficult to pin down the nature of a movement which Jean-Louis

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Pellegrinetti, 'Langue et identité: l'exemple du corse durant la troisième république', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 66 (2003), pp. 265–77; Jean-Paul Pellegrinetti and Ange Rovere, *La Corse et la République. La vie politique de la fin du second Empire au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Ysée Rogé, *Le corsisme et l'irrédentisme 1920–1946. Histoire du premier mouvement autonomiste corse et de sa compromission par l'Italie fasciste* (Paris, 2008); Deborah Paci, *Corsica fatal. Malta baluardo di romanità. L'irredentismo fascista nel mare nostrum (1922–1942)* (Florence, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Lorenzo Di Stefano, *Il Pci in Sardegna, il Pci in Corsica e l'identità insulare (1920–1991)* (Milan, 2023), p. 181.

<sup>36</sup> Sylvain Gregori, '(R)écrire l'histoire de la Résistance corse: de l'enjeu mémoriel à l'essai historiographique', in Julien Blanc and Cécile Vast (eds), *Chercheurs en Résistance. Pistes et outils à l'usage des historiens* (Rennes, 2014), pp. 67–81.

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Paul Pellegrinetti and Ange Rovere, *La Corse et la République. La vie politique de la fin du second Empire au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, cit., p. 351.

<sup>38</sup> Deborah Paci, 'La "comunità immaginata" corsa (1974–1984). Il nazionalismo nello sguardo dei contemporanei', in Andrea Geniola and Deborah Paci (eds), *Sulle tracce della comunità immaginata. Identità e istituzioni nell'Europa degli stati nazionali* (Milan, 2022), pp. 63–83, at p. 80.



Andreani defined as ‘pre-regionalist’<sup>39</sup> and which Xavier Crettiez does not recognise as having the will to express demands linked to identity.<sup>40</sup>

In 1957, the French government launched its Programme d’Action Régionale (PAR) to bring about a modernisation process in the agricultural and tourist sectors.<sup>41</sup> One of the most significant outcomes of the PAR was the creation of two mixed-economy companies: the Société pour la mise en valeur agricole de la Corse (SOMIVAC) and the Société pour l’équipement touristique de la Corse.<sup>42</sup> PAR’s objective was to generate rapid economic growth: for this reason, all intervention in the road infrastructure sector and the water system was considered to be essential for the development of tourism. It considered tourism as the ‘driver for rebirth’ on an island destined to become a ‘second Côte d’Azur’.<sup>43</sup> However, the PAR provoked waves of widespread discontent that contributed to the development of Corsican regionalism.<sup>44</sup>

In May 1959, the Défense des Intérêts Économiques de la Corse (DIECO) was set up to request fiscal intervention. DIECO sought the support of Corsicans on the continent through the mediation of Saladini, one of the most powerful executives of the Corsican association of Algiers, and cousin of Michel Martini, the president of the Bastia committee of the Mouvement du 29 novembre. At the initiative of the Corsican associations of Algiers, the first council of the ‘Corses de l’Extérieur’ was held in Corte on 25 August 1959. These events show how the Corsican diaspora had become aware of the need to help their compatriots on the island to work together for the renewal of Corsica. As Pierre Dottelonde has pointed out, while the problem of the railways acted as trigger in the creation of the movement, an equally important role was played by De Gaulle’s election which shook up the political panorama on the island.<sup>45</sup> During the legislative elections of February 1959, François Giacobbi was elected president of the Conseil Général de la Corse and tasked with putting forward the requests of the malcontents: in July 1959, he helped set up the Comité de liaison des Corses du Bassin méditerranéen, supported Martini’s initiatives and became a member of the Comité de la presse insulaire set up on 25 October 1959.

<sup>39</sup> Lorenzo Di Stefano, *Il Pci in Sardegna, il Pci in Corsica e l’identità insulare (1920–1991)*, cit., p. 116.

<sup>40</sup> Xavier Crettiez, *La Question Corse*, cit., p. 30.

<sup>41</sup> Deborah Paci, ‘Pianificazione territoriale, turismo ed ecoturismo nell’Île de Beauté. Immagini, politiche e pratiche’, in Deborah Paci and Federica Letizia Cavallo (eds), *Il tesoro dell’isola. Ecoturismo e insularità in Europa* (Milan, 2021), pp. 91–111, at pp. 96–7.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Martinetti, ‘Les tourments du tourisme sur l’île de Beauté’, *Hérodote*, 127/4 (2007), pp. 29–46.

<sup>43</sup> Janine Renucci, ‘La Corse et le tourisme’, *Revue de géographie de Lyon*, 37/3 (1962), pp. 207–24, at p. 215.

<sup>44</sup> André Fazi, ‘Les stratégies d’aménagement régional en Corse: mutation du contexte et permanence des difficultés’, 2009, pp. 1–14, at p. 9. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272356037\\_Les\\_strategies\\_d\\_amenagement\\_regional\\_en\\_Corse\\_mutation\\_du\\_contexte\\_et\\_permanence\\_des\\_difficultes](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272356037_Les_strategies_d_amenagement_regional_en_Corse_mutation_du_contexte_et_permanence_des_difficultes), accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>45</sup> Pierre Dottelonde, *Histoire de la revendication corse (1959–1974)* (Paris, 1984), p. 70.

The Corsican question began to take shape in the 1960s, within a regionalist, Third-Worldist current emerging in Paris, Bastia, and in the rural microregion of Fiumorbo, within an international political context that was rapidly changing due to decolonisation.<sup>46</sup> This decade saw the emergence of a new regionalism raising the question of the economic disparity between the island and other French regions. In 1960, Gisèle Poli and Charles Santoni set up the Union Corse association in Paris with the aim of building ties within the young Corsican community in Paris, in cultural, social, and sports sectors. On the occasion of the second meeting, which took place on 17 December 1960, the Union Corse steering committee developed a project to create a committee to help Corsican students find accommodation and work. On 18 July 1962, Dominique Alfonsi founded the Union nationale des Etudiants Corses, which held its first congress at Vivariu. On 14 June 1964, Union Corse, l'Avenir was established under the presidency of Alfonsi. On 11 August 1963, the first Corsican youth congress was held in the Palazzu Naziunale, Corte, providing regionalist youth movements with a platform.<sup>47</sup> On 27 November 1963, the Comité d'Action et de Promotion de la Corse (CAPCO) was set up to represent all of the trade union and professional associations on the island as well as Corsicans living abroad; however, due to its many internal divisions, the project failed. In fact, the movement was led by the Fédération des Groupements Corses de l'Extérieur but proved unable to win the support of young people who found CAPCO's politics too conciliatory. It was forced to step down when the Front Régionaliste Corse (FRC) made its appearance in 1966. On 17 May 1967, CAPCO changed its name, becoming the non-political Mouvement Revendicatif Insulaire (MRI). This form of regionalism was equally critical of the clientelism that was responsible for poor conditions on the island. This system involved individuals in power acting as mediators between the local administration and government in Paris, giving their complete loyalty to the French institutions. The regionalist movements of the time broke away from the mentality of the clan and clientist systems but ended up reproducing the community dynamics that had always been present in Corsica.

In the early 1960s, Corsica experienced wide-reaching developments: the arrival from 1958 onwards – but in particular after 1962 – of the *pieds-noirs*, people of French descent born in Algeria who were repatriated to France after Algeria gained independence, who joined the increasing numbers of continental French and, on an economic level, the intensive development of agriculture, mainly on the Eastern Plain.<sup>48</sup> Faced with the transformations taking place in that period, traditional Corsica<sup>49</sup> began to waver and movements making various demands sought to ride

<sup>46</sup> Marianne Lefevre, *Géopolitique de la Corse. Le modèle républicain en question* (Paris, 2000), p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Dottelonde, *Histoire de la revendication corse (1959–1974)*, pp. 167–8.

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Emile, 'Les "Pieds Noirs" de la Corse', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 1 (1970), pp. 11–64.

<sup>49</sup> Janine Renucci, *Corse traditionnelle et Corse nouvelle. La géographie d'une île*, p. 280.



the waves of change.<sup>50</sup> Regionalist protests focused on the agricultural policies in favour of the *pieds-noirs*.<sup>51</sup> It was then that the president of SOMIVAC acknowledged that no less than sixteen of the eighteen lots of land available in the commune of Ghisonaccia, in the Eastern Plain, had been allocated to repatriated French. In 1965, after allocating thirteen out of twenty-seven lots to *pieds-noirs*, SOMIVAC suffered a terrorist attack, which did not take into account the fact that the land had been bought thanks to a loan from the Conseil général, which had provided reassurances that the land would be allocated to young Corsicans.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, SOMIVAC policies caused the price of agricultural land to increase to the detriment of indigenous Corsicans, who lacked sufficient funds to buy land and felt threatened by the settlement of *pieds-noirs*.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the tourist flow, which grew year on year, ended up being resented by the locals, who saw it as a factor contributing to price increases.

The early 1960s saw the emergence of a new generation of Corsicans who were becoming more and more aware of what was happening on the island. Mostly from the rural middle class, these young Corsicans went to study in cities in continental France, a period of 'exile' from the island that gave them the opportunity to develop their critical thinking with regard to Corsica.<sup>54</sup>

The regionalist movement was divided into three strands expressing different ideologies and practices, corresponding to the militant groups based in Bastia, Ajaccio and Paris, and autonomously directed by Max and Edmond Simeoni, Dominique Alfonsi and Charles Santoni. Charles Santoni was a socialist militant who belonged to the Front Républicain of Pierre Mendès-France; Dominique Alfonsi was left wing although with a less Marxist background; the Simeoni brothers had right-wing tendencies and links to the Gavini and Pietri clans. The Gavini family was one of the oldest in Corsica. Jacques Gavini was a member of parliament from 1945 to 1962, and secretary of the state for the navy between 1951 and 1954. François Pietri, Jacques Gavini's cousin, member of parliament between 1924 and 1940, was minister on seven occasions and withdrew from the political scene after being found guilty of having helped collaborators during Second World War. The Simeoni brothers' father, former mayor of Lozzi in the Niolo region, was dismissed from his position for having helped François Pietri and the collaborators.

<sup>50</sup> Pierre Dottelonde, *Histoire de la revendication corse (1959–1974)*, p. 146.

<sup>51</sup> Michel Labro, *La question corse* (Paris, 1977), p. 62; Thierry Desjardins, *La Corse à la dérive* (Paris, 1977), p. 108.

<sup>52</sup> André Fazi, 'Les stratégies d'aménagement régional en Corse: mutation du contexte et permanence des difficultés', p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Janine Renucci, *Corse traditionnelle et Corse nouvelle. La géographie d'une île*, p. 429; Wanda Dressler-Holahan, *Développement économique et mouvement autonomiste. Les cas de la Corse* (Grenoble, 1981), p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> Anne Meistersheim, 'Du riacquistu au désenchantement. Une société en quête de repères', *Ethnologie française*, 38/3 (2008), pp. 407–13.

In 1966, the FRC was founded, bringing various different strands together. The first was a left-wing strand formed of the Union Corse and the Union Nationale des Etudiants Corse (1962) representing Corsican students living on the continent. The second, on the other hand, was made up of Corsicans without a clear ideological position, belonging to the Comité d'Études et de Défense des Intérêts de la Corse (CEDIC), formed in Bastia in 1964. Paul-Marc Seta and Max Simeoni were prominent members of CEDIC.<sup>55</sup> In 1965, the Comité d'intérêt du Fiumorbu was established, demanding the redistribution of the land on the eastern plain to Corsican farmers. In 1966, Max Simeoni and Charles Santoni promoted the 'Assises Régionales de la jeune Corse' in Corte, which focused on the theme of 'living and working in the country'. The following year saw the creation of the MRI and on 3 September 1967, of Action Régionaliste Corse (ARC) with Max Simeoni (general secretary), Pierre Beretti, Jean Mannarini and Yves Le Bomin. The ARC wished to present itself as an 'apolitical' movement that existed outside of the political reality dominated by the clans. The Parti Corse pour le Progrès (PCP) was also founded in the same period. Dominique Alfonsi gave rise to a third strand with his PCP, which aimed to fill the void left by the absence of political parties and trade-union organisations in the area of Corsican calls for greater autonomy, especially in Ajaccio. This party belonged to the same ideological current as the FRC but did not have real grass-roots support. These divisions into different movements reveal the community orientation underpinning the movement overall. Edmond Simeoni became a prominent figure within the ARC thanks to his ability to acquire increasing popular consensus.<sup>56</sup>

In 1969, various incidents took place in the wake of the creation of the Carbosarda power line which would have transformed the face of Corsica in order to transmit Italian electricity to Sardinia. The planning stage in 1959 provided for a line for high-voltage transmission from Tuscany to Sardinia and would have involved the installation of huge transmission towers, bringing no benefits to Corsicans. In September 1965, when an announcement was published in the *Journal Officiel* declaring the public utility of the Carbosarda power line, the population challenged the government as did the five Corsican parliamentarians – François Giacobbi, Jean Filippi, Jean-Paul de Rocca Serra, Jean Orabona and Jean Zuccarelli – who refused to attend a meeting called for by Minister Olivier Guichard. The French authorities ended up having to deny this Italian request in exchange for the construction of a French lycée in Rome.

Evidence of the growing importance of the ARC emerges from an initiative undertaken by the heads of the movement by organising the Etats Généraux de la Corse in Ajaccio between 1967 and 1970. In 1971, Corsica was separated from the Département de la Côte d'Azur, a decision

<sup>55</sup> Dominique Antoni, *Corse. Corsica entre le statu quo et l'autonomie* (Paris, 1978).

<sup>56</sup> Anne Chabanon, *Les mémoires d'Edmond Simeoni* (Paris, 2019); Pierre Dottelonde, *Un combat pour la Corse Edmond Simeoni entretiens avec Pierre Dottelonde* (Paris, 2003).

criticised by the ARC in May 1972. 27 July 1971 saw the adoption of the Schéma d'Aménagement, a tourism-focused development plan intended to increase tourists from half a million to 2.2 million by 1982.<sup>57</sup> In 1970–1, ARC promoted a campaign against anti-Corsican discrimination, publishing the conclusions of the report developed by the Hudson Institute investigating the behaviour of the Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale regarding the economic development of the island. This report proposed two possible solutions to the French State for dealing with the Corsican question: the first involved the progressive 'erosion of cultural identity' through policies facilitating and encouraging mass immigration from the continent,<sup>58</sup> the second involved policies aimed to 'preserve and revive the Corsican cultural identity and traditions, developing the potential of the island'.<sup>59</sup>

In the infancy of nationalism, the clans looked favourably upon sectoral demands made by the political actors and members of civil society who would end up in the nationalist camp. This is revealed by the stance adopted by Jean-Paul de Rocca Serra and François Giacobbi with regard to the planned Carbosarda and Argentella power lines. Nonetheless, we should underline that the nationalist movement was in its very early days and could not count upon a similar consensus among the Corsican population as the clans. Members of the clans were perceived as 'friends'. This did not just imply a link of dependence but a relationship of solidarity typical of the community-type logic underpinning interpersonal relations on the island. The nationalists presented themselves as the advocates of an anti-clan mentality but they also used the clans' community- and welfare-oriented methods – at least in part. This was a gradual process that took place in response to the support for the nationalists expressed by a large segment of the population.

### III

In the early 1970s, the protest movement of the post-1968 generation spread to young Corsicans who began to make themselves heard in the face of the worsening economic crisis and the climate of instability resulting from decolonisation now affecting France. In order to cope with this situation, which was by now unbearable, they turned to their identity-based heritage made up of the Corsican language, history and culture to express their desire for the recognition of a series of rights for the island. One of the main battles facing these young Corsicans educated in universities on the French continent was the opening of a university in Corsica.

<sup>57</sup> André Fazi, 'Les stratégies d'aménagement régional en Corse: mutation du contexte et permanence des difficultés', in Pedro Sánchez Vera and Alberto Riella (eds), *Globalización y perspectivas de la integración regional* (Murcia, 2010), pp. 327–52.

<sup>58</sup> Dominique Antoni, *Corse. Corsica entre le statu quo et l'autonomie*, p. 72.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72–3.

In 1971, *Main basse sur une île* was published.<sup>60</sup> Written by a group of FRC militants and highlighting the island's role as a colony, it would become the handbook of these young Corsicans. The following year saw the final of the Coupe de France in Paris between Olympique de Marseille and the Sporting Club de Bastia: on this occasion, Corsican youth proudly displayed the Moor's head flag, singing the Corsican anthem 'Dio Vi Salvi Regina'.<sup>61</sup> In the summer of 1972, the so-called Ghjurnate corse di Corti were held in Corte (6–11 August), providing an occasion for meetings and discussions of cultural and historic themes. It was the first occasion in which nationalist youth had the opportunity to express their cultural and political demands in the context of a public event. These were the years of the *riacquistu*, a cultural reawakening of part of a new generation of Corsicans actively engaged in promoting the Corsican language and culture.<sup>62</sup> The following year, from 1 to 11 August 1973, the Centre d'Etudes Corses d'Aix held the Summer University in Corte. This was the period in which militancy was expressed through the promotion of minority languages, especially Basque,<sup>63</sup> Occitan<sup>64</sup> and even Berber.<sup>65</sup> Other summer universities held in addition to the Corsican university included a Catalan summer university at Prades in 1969, an Occitan university at Montpellier in 1972 and a Basque university in 1973 at St. Jean-de-Luz. Also in 1973, ARC changed its name to *Azzione pe a Rinascita di a Corsica* and affirmed its intention to pursue autonomy as an objective. In January of that same year, in Castellare di Casinca, the Terra Corsa movement brought together Gisèle Poli, Joseph Leonelli, José Stromboni, Jean Pontéri, Charles Santoni and an ARC delegation to develop and draft a document establishing the aim of 'internal autonomy' ('A Chjama di u Castellare').<sup>66</sup> In February, Corsica was shaken by a series of protests against the dumping of toxic waste, the so-called 'Boues rouges' off Cap Corse by the Italian Montedison company.<sup>67</sup>

At that time, ARC broke away from regionalism, as revealed by the meeting held on 4 August 1973 during the first edition of the summer university in Corte. Given that the initial text of 'A Chjama di u Castellare' was the work of Charles Santoni, in particular, it is clear that the FRC was the first Corsican regionalist movement to transform into an autonomist organisation. The FRC realised that the struggle of the clans was no longer the fundamental characteristic distinguishing the island's situation and that it was necessary to focus on the fight to safeguard the Corsican

<sup>60</sup> Front Régionaliste Corse, *Main basse sur une île* (Paris, 1971).

<sup>61</sup> Didier Rey, *La Corse et son football 1905–2000* (Ajaccio, 2003), p. 289.

<sup>62</sup> Antoine Ottavi, *Des Corses à part entière* (Paris, 1979), p. 141.

<sup>63</sup> Barbara Loyer, 'Identités et pouvoir local : le cas de la revendication d'un département Pays basque' *Hérodote* 110 (2003), pp. 103–28.

<sup>64</sup> James Costa, 'A materialist take on minoritization, emancipation, and language revitalization: Occitan sociolinguistics since the 1970s', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 2023, pp. 1–18.

<sup>65</sup> Nadia Berdous, 'La dénomination «langue kabyle», un enjeu politique' *Multilinguales* 17 (2022), pp. 1–15.

<sup>66</sup> Pierre Dottelonde, *Histoire de la revendication corse (1959–1974)*, p. 481.

<sup>67</sup> Lucia Molinelli-Cancellier, *Boues rouges, la Corse dit non* (Paris, 1995).

people from the threat of colonialism. Without forgetting that the aim of their battle was to establish Corsican socialism, FRC militants identified their immediate objective as the autonomy of Corsica.<sup>68</sup> This led to the birth of the Partitu di u Populu Corsu (PPC) in April 1973. In 1974, the PPC and PCP of Dominique Alfonsi merged to form a new political organisation named Partitu di u Populu Corsu pà l'Autonomia. In Paris, FRC dissidents founded U Partitu Corsu pà u Sucialismu led by Jean-Pierre Santini, a small party that would contribute, together with others, to the creation of the FLNC.<sup>69</sup>

In the face of the developments of the nationalist movement, the State proposed a number of reforms by drafting a Charte d'aménagement et d'équipement de la Corse. In December 1974, the Council of Ministers appointed Libert Bou president of Corsica's Mission Interministérielle responsible for 'aménagement et de l'équipement'.<sup>70</sup> In January 1975, the Simeoni brothers, who were supporters of a model of internal autonomy inspired by the Sardinian model, were called to Paris by Libert Bou. The preparatory text referred to the 'Corsican people' whose Corsican language and culture needed to be safeguarded. It also expressed the desire to remedy the imbalanced development of the island in relation to the other realities through the election of the regional Council for universal and proportional suffrage. Yet this attempted dialogue failed because of the base of the autonomist movement and especially because of the radicalising impetus coming from young Corsicans.<sup>71</sup>

The first half of the 1970s was distinguished by the reformulation in autonomist terms of the aims pursued by political formations making identity-based claims. This period with its many theoretical reflections saw the emergence of an attitude critical of the clans: according to the nationalist point of view, this was a system that needed to be torn down to its foundations and replaced by a community movement overcoming all types of division in order to allow the "Corsican people" to emerge.

#### IV

In the collective imaginary, the events that took place in Aléria saw the nationalist movement enter its mature phase.<sup>72</sup> The emergence of a widespread sense of injustice resulted in the radicalisation of the movement. On 22 August 1975, the ARC leader, Edmond Simeoni, led a group of armed men to occupy a wine cellar owned by Henri

<sup>68</sup> Vanina, *Corse: la liberté, pas la mort* (Paris, 1984).

<sup>69</sup> Jean-Pierre Santini, *Une île sous le temps* (Barrettali, 2019); Jean-Pierre Santini, *L'arme des mots* (Barrettali, 2019).

<sup>70</sup> Michel Labro, *La question corse*, pp. 101–105; Antoine Sanguinetti, *Procès des jacobins* (Paris, 1979), p. 81.

<sup>71</sup> Marianne Lefevre, *Géopolitique de la Corse. Le modèle républicain en question*, pp. 22–3.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Silvani, *Corse des années ardentes 1939–1976* (Paris, 1976), pp. 199–205; Michel Labro, *La question corse*, pp. 121–3; Jean-Paul Delors and Stéphane Muracciole, *Corse la poudrière* (Paris, 1978), p. 23; Deborah Paci, 'La "comunità immaginata" corsa (1974–1984). Il nazionalismo nello sguardo dei contemporanei', pp. 67–71.

Depeille, a *pied-noir* winemaker who was held to be involved in a financial scandal related to the adulteration of wine.<sup>73</sup> This action showed Simeoni responding to the challenge from the movement's grass-roots, which had asked him to choose 'between the fishing rod and the gun'.<sup>74</sup> To understand why a wine cellar in Aléria was occupied, we need to remember that Aléria lay in the heart of the Eastern Plain, an area with high numbers of *pied-noir* immigrants. Simeoni and the ARC's objective was to obtain the liberation of Dominique Capretti, an imprisoned militant, as well as the redistribution of 2000 hectares of land and wine cellars to local farmers.<sup>75</sup> The State reacted in a heavy-handed manner given the small number of militants involved: in fact, the then Minister of the Interior Michel Poniatowski sent over two thousand gendarmes, helicopters, and armoured vehicles to stop a group of autonomists comprising between twenty to fifty men and armed with hunting rifles.<sup>76</sup> Paris proved that it intended to use the 'stick and carrot' strategy. At the end of November 1975, a decree was finally passed to establish the University of Corsica, which was due to open in May 1981. The nationalists decided to locate the campus in Corte for a variety of reasons: the university would have helped revitalise the interior of the island; it would have been equidistant from Bastia and Ajaccio, thereby avoiding friction between the two cities; it would have a high symbolic value because this was where Pasquale Paoli had founded the university in 1765.

Although the opening of the university represented one of the initial goals of the nationalist battle right from the start, the events of Aléria triggered a radicalisation process that resulted in the birth of an armed clandestine movement, the FLNC.<sup>77</sup> The FLNC used the instruments of a terrorist struggle to advance separatist claims. The movement grew out of the merger of the clandestine organisations Ghjustizia paolina, Fronte paisanu corsu di liberazione and Partitu corsu per u socialismu. During the night between 4 and 5 May 1976, the FLNC carried out twenty-two bombing attacks in Corsica and on the mainland, one of which was on the Palais de Justice in Marseille. On 5 May, in what is held to be its founding action, the FLNC held a secret press conference in the convent of Saint-Antoine de Casabianca. The location was not chosen by chance; in fact, it was here that Pasquale Paoli had declared Corsican independence on 17 July 1755. In 1977, during the course of the press conference at the convent of Saint-Antoine de Casabianca, the FLNC presented its 'Petit Livre Vert' manifesto entitled *A libertà o a*

<sup>73</sup> Edmond Simeoni, *Le piège d'Aleria* (Paris, 1976).

<sup>74</sup> Emmanuel Bernabeu-Casanova, *Le nationalisme corse: Genèse, succès et échec* (Paris, 1997), p. 94.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Silvani, 'Aléria, le 22 août 1975, à 16 h. 15', *Le Monde* (18 May 1976). [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1976/05/18/aleria-le-22-aout-1975-a-16-h-15\\_3144752\\_1819218.htm](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1976/05/18/aleria-le-22-aout-1975-a-16-h-15_3144752_1819218.htm), accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>76</sup> Xavier Crettiez, André Fazi and Gérald Lenclud, 'D'un passé aux possibles. Rencontre avec Gérard Lenclud', p. 167.

<sup>77</sup> Pierre Poggioli, *FLNC, années 70* (Ajaccio, 2006); Pierre Poggioli, *Corse et FLNC: une page d'histoire*, (I, Carbuccia, 2018).



*morte*. FLNC took responsibility for spectacular bombings like the one that destroyed an Air France Boeing 707 in Ajaccio airport in September, the bombing of the Bastia television relay station on 17 August 1977, and the bombing of the radar station at the Solenzara air base on 13 January 1978. From 1978 onwards, Raymond Barre's government took a repressive approach to the FLNC, culminating with the celebrated 'procès des 21' in 1979.<sup>78</sup> In the meantime, the Front d'Action Nouvelle Contre l'Indépendance et l'Autonomie (FRANCIA) appeared on the scene, an organisation formed of covert police divisions led by Pierre Debizet, a prominent member of Service d'Action Civique. FRANCIA emerged in 1977 thanks to the merger of two small groups: Jhiustizia Morandina and Jhiustizia Liberta. Its members were involved in numerous attacks against the autonomists: according to official estimates, six in 1977, thirty-nine in 1978, and over thirty in 1979.<sup>79</sup>

After the Aleria events and the establishment of the FLNC, the nationalist movement won a broad consensus among the Corsican population. Although the clans continued to exercise their power, they had to confront nationalism, which was making an anti-clan approach its distinguishing feature.

The writer Rinatu Coti was responsible for distinguishing between *corsité*, which is the manner of appearing Corsican, and *corsitude*, which refers to the wish to exist as Corsicans. This distinction was picked up in 1976 by Charles Santoni<sup>80</sup> who drew attention to the fact that *corsité* should be attributed to the 'clanistes' while *corsitude* is the characteristic distinguishing nationalists.

It was his opinion that the latter, aware of the gravity of the island's political and economic situation, were mobilising in order to change the course of events while other Corsicans were indifferent to the dissolution of the Corsican identity, preferring to sacrifice the Corsican people in the name of the clan and the French homeland.

## V

The rhetoric of victimhood, of an island that is both neglected but also a focus of attention due to its volatility, is widespread in the intellectual production of that decade: a period in which nationalism would go through various phases (from regionalism to internal autonomy and then to nationalism) and in which the events of Aléria and the growing influence of the FLNC marked years of violence, progress and failure. The figures speak for themselves: between 1980 and 1989, among a population

<sup>78</sup> L. G., 'Le procès des nationalistes corses s'est ouvert à Paris. Une conférence de presse clandestine du F.L.N.C.', *Le Monde* (15 June 1979). [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1979/06/15/le-proces-des-nationalistes-corses-s-est-ouvert-a-paris-une-conference-de-presse-clandestine-du-f-l-n-c\\_3054214\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1979/06/15/le-proces-des-nationalistes-corses-s-est-ouvert-a-paris-une-conference-de-presse-clandestine-du-f-l-n-c_3054214_1819218.html), accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>79</sup> Marianne Lefevre, *Géopolitique de la Corse. Le modèle républicain en question*, p. 24.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Santoni, *Les masques du discours politique en Corse* pubblicato sulla rivista *Les Temps Modernes*, n. 357, aprile 1976, p. 1630.

of less than 250,000 inhabitants, there were no less than 4141 attacks claimed by secret organisations against small business owners, with mafia racketeering involving real estate, banks, and government officials from the mainland. As Marianne Lefevre has emphasised, political violence and common violence became complementary: 'racketeering and 'revolutionary taxes' went hand in hand. The 'Corsican question' became the 'Corsican loss of control'.<sup>81</sup>

In fact, 1980 was marked by the Bastelica Fesch events, which helped to reinforce the image of nationalists as bringers of justice in the popular mind. The State was accused of having entered into a privileged relationship with the *barbouzes* operating in the FRANCIA movement.<sup>82</sup> On 6 January 1980, a group of militants from the Union Autonomiste du peuple corse (UPC), a movement that had replaced ARC, along with several members of the nationalist collective of Bastelica, led by Marcel Lorenzoni, took three people hostage who were accused of belonging to covert police divisions and of having hatched a plot to kill Lorenzoni. This *affaire* pitted two men, both militants and ex-paratrooper, against each other: on the one side, Lorenzoni, farmer and livestock breeder, leader of the armed squad at Aléria and himself the victim of a failed assassination attempt in the summer of 1978; and, on the other, Captain Pierre Bertolini, decorated professional officer in the parachute regiment, who had fought in the Forces Françaises Libres at the age of sixteen and claimed to belong to the Organisation de l'armée secrète, a secret military-political organisation with far-right affiliations created on 11 February 1961 to defend the French presence in Algeria. Bertolini had also been seriously injured during an attack in 1978. Both Bertolini and Lorenzoni accused each other of having sought to cause the other's death.<sup>83</sup>

The State sent the police forces in while the group left for Ajaccio, where they took several clients hostage in the Hotel Fesch. Their intention was to draw attention to the existence of covert police divisions in Corsica and to the State's connivance with the FRANCIA movement. Numerous figures and bodies were involved in the mediation attempts, including the Mayor of Ajaccio, the bishop of Corsica, left-wing parties, nationalist and socio-professional organisations and trade unions. The tension went through the roof and there were several clashes resulting in a number of people being injured, and in the death of a member of the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité, as well as of passers-by like a young teacher who was hit by a stray bullet fired by a member of the Office Central de Répression du Banditisme. The government in Paris sought to minimise the incident and the national press described those tragic events as 'mishaps'.<sup>84</sup> This provoked widespread indignation

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> Francis Pomponi, *Le Mémorial des Corses* (V, Ajaccio, 1982).

<sup>83</sup> Marianne Lefevre, *Géopolitique de la Corse. Le modèle républicain en question*, p. 25.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 25–6.

both in Corsica and among the Corsicans belonging to the diaspora. On 11 January, the negotiations came to an end and the hostages were released. In this climate of great tension, a general strike was called. In February, Corsica's first feminist movement was born, taking the name Donni Corsi (in Ajaccio) and Donne Corse (in Bastia), triggered by the arrest of the nationalist militants Jackie Lucchini and Laetitia Gasperi in the wake of the Bastelica Fesch events. This movement, which would be short-lived, defined its orientation as feminist, nationalist and socialist. On 8 March 1980, the Consulta di i Cumitati Naziunalisti (CCN) was born out of the merger of various nationalist committees. These committees, based in Luri, Cap Corse and Fiumorbo, were created with the aim of providing support to the imprisoned militants involved in the Hotel Fesch incident. The CCN was basically the legal face of the FLNC. On 1 April 1981, the FLNC published its 'Livre Blanc' entitled *Per a Corsica nazione. A populu fattu bisogna marchjà* in which it defined the strategy behind their fight for the exercise of self-determination in the framework of the so-called LLN (Lutte de libération nationale). The affirmation of the concept of the fight for national liberation implied the development of 'counterpowers' in a revolutionary context, beginning with the creation, in 1984, of the Sindicatu di travagliatori corsi (STC).<sup>85</sup> But August 1981 was also marked by the 'Ghjurnate Internazionale di Corti', a yearly event organised by the CCN with the aim of exploring the Corsican question within an international framework. In fact, it is no coincidence that foreign delegations made up of representatives of nationalist movements – Irish, Catalan, Breton, and Basque, amongst others – were invited to the event every year. During the festival, Corsican nationalists had the opportunity to come together to dwell on the aims and approaches adopted by the nationalist struggle.

In 1981, François Mitterand was elected President of the Republic, giving many people in Corsica hope that this might mark the beginning of a process of political pacification and an amnesty was declared for anyone responsible for political and social crimes before 23 December 1980. Moreover, in 1982, the island acquired a special statute or 'statut particulier' which involved the establishment of a regional assembly elected on the basis of universal and proportional suffrage.<sup>86</sup> Until 1991, the assembly was flanked by two advisory councils: the Conseil de la culture, de l'éducation et du cadre de vie and the Conseil économique et social. The 1982 regional elections saw the participation of the UPC as well as the abstention of the CCN, which followed in the footsteps of the FLNC. Edmond Simeoni was elected as a member of the Regional Assembly but from 1984 onwards, he withdrew from the political scene

<sup>85</sup> Christophe Canioni and Marie-Jean Vinciguerra, *Dictionnaire de la politique corse contemporaine de 1975 à nos jours* (Bastia, 2009), p. 207.

<sup>86</sup> Francis Pomponi, *Le Mémorial des Corses*; John Loughlin, *The Corsican statut particulier a response to the probleme corse* (Florence, 1985).

because of ill health. He was replaced by his brother Max who lacked his charisma.<sup>87</sup>

On 5 January 1983, the FLNC was dissolved as a result of the decree of 10 January 1936 regarding combat groups and private militias. Nevertheless, despite numerous arrests among its militants, the clandestine movement continued its activities and officially recognised the so-called 'revolutionary tax', which involved extorting money from non-Corsican small business owners to support the activities of the FLNC and contribute to the fund for the families of political prisoners. On 27 September 1983, the CCN was dissolved following the murder of the secretary general of the département de Haute-Corse, Pierre-Jean Massimi. The FLNC claimed responsibility for the murder and gave as the motive the fact that Massimi had been given a sum of money by Joseph Franceschi, secretary of State for public safety to pay the killers of the militant Guy Orsoni. The CCN was replaced by the Muvimentu Corsu per l'Autodeterminazione, which was established on 3 October 1983, with Léo Battesti as general secretary to act as the legal face of the FLNC. On 28 June 1987, it was replaced by A Cuncolta nazionalista. The UPC condemned the unbridled violence that broke out on every public occasion but to no avail; by now a fratricidal war was underway that would involve the entire nationalist family.<sup>88</sup>

This decade saw an exponential increase in the number of attacks for which the FLNC claimed responsibility. After all, violence was a part of the island's history. The clan system envisaged a certain amount of violence, necessary to maintain the power of the clans: 'this was the case with banditry then with autonomism; it's happening again with nationalism. The violence [...] allowed the clan to tell the State: It's none of your business. You don't know what's going on so keep out of it. We'll take care of things'.<sup>89</sup> As José Gil has pointed out, Corsica acquired a tripolar political and social system based on state-clan-nationalism that saw violence used on multiple levels:

the clan channels, tames, and transforms this violence into institutional and therefore legitimised power. [...] This triangular system (State-Clan-nationalism) functioned thanks to the connivance or even complicity of its three poles: based on expediency, the clan either protects the nationalists from state repression or pushes the State to act against them. How does the clan define what to do? Its actions aim to keep the violence in circulation below a certain threshold and to guarantee the clan – in the face of the State and of the nationalists – a foothold in the seats of power.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Peter Savigear, 'Corsica', in Michael Watson (ed.), *Contemporary Minority Nationalism* (New York, 1990), pp. 86–99, at p. 90.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>89</sup> José Gil, 'Corse: feu le «système» de la violence' *Libération* 20 Novembre 1996. November 20, 1996. [https://www.liberation.fr/tribune/1996/11/20/corse-feu-le-systeme-de-la-violence\\_188052/](https://www.liberation.fr/tribune/1996/11/20/corse-feu-le-systeme-de-la-violence_188052/), accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

## VI

A large part of Corsican society was convinced that the acts of terrorism carried out by the FLNC were legitimate, that the very existence of the clandestine movement was a ‘necessary evil’ and that this violence needed to be seen in the context of the existing violence perpetuated against Corsicans.<sup>91</sup>

In 1989, there were tensions within the FLNC, which led to a split in the movement and the creation, at the initiative of Pierre Poggioli, of the secret organisation called *Resistenza*, which was responsible for various attacks, especially in southern Corsica, and of its legal face, the *Accolta nazionale corsa* (ANC). In October 1990, *Resistenza* denounced the practice of demanding the ‘revolutionary tax’.

In 1989, major strikes in the public sector caused a further worsening of relations with the government in Paris. On 21 February 1989, there was a strike among civil servants demanding the so-called ‘prime d’insularité’, a kind of allowance to offset higher living costs due to the fact that Corsica was an island. According to demonstrators, consumer prices were around 15% higher in Corsica than in the continental regions. Thanks to the support of the *Confédération générale du travail* and the *STC*, an impressive number of workers were mobilised, and ports and airports were blocked. One thousand people took to the streets to protest. On 3 May 1989, after months of protests, Corsicans obtained the right to the ‘prime d’insularité’. It was established that every civil servant would receive a bonus of 2400 francs a year, well below the amount requested by the trade unions. After 1995, the bonus underwent a further increase.<sup>92</sup>

In 1990, the *Golfe-Sud* affair revealed the process of *gangstérisation* taking place on the island at that time with the murders of Charles Grossetti, Mayor of Grosseto-Prugna and deputy president of the regional council of southern Corsica; of Paul Mariani, Mayor of Soveria and a member of the office of the minister in charge of trade and industry; and Lucien Tirroloni, the President of the Regional Chamber of Agriculture.<sup>93</sup>

In August 1990, new tensions emerged within the FLNC, where the majority of the executive, grouped around Alain Orsoni, was opposed by its militant base. François Santoni, one of the senior managers of the FLNC, had accused Orsoni of a lack of transparency in his handling of the funds collected thanks to the ‘revolutionary tax’ as well as to the companies managed by the nationalists. In September–October 1990, there was a split within the FLNC. Alain Orsoni resigned from *Cuncolta* along with Yves Stella, Dominique Bianchi, José Pietri, Léo Battesti,

<sup>91</sup> Thierry Dominici, ‘Le nationalisme dans la Corse contemporaine’, *Pôle Sud*, 20/1 (2004), pp. 97–112, at p. 101.

<sup>92</sup> France 3 Corse *ViaStella*, ‘Il y a 30 ans, les Corses obtenaient la prime d’insularité’, *France 3 Corse ViaStella* (2 May 2019). <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/corse/il-y-30-ans-corses-obtenaient-prime-insularite-1663713.html>, accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>93</sup> Marianne Lefevre, *Géopolitique de la Corse. Le modèle républicain en question*, p. 15.

Jean-Louis Antonelli and Gilbert Casanova (who became the president of the chamber of commerce of southern Corsica) and founded the Muvimentu per l'autodeterminazione (MPA).

The MPA, the legal wing, and the regular wing of the FLNC, its clandestine wing, were established during the congress on 12 May 1991. The MPA was mainly situated in the coastal areas, in southern Corsica, in the Ajaccio gulf and the Balagne area. Orsoni, Battesti and Stella had all completed their studies in Nice or Paris in the 1960s and 1970s and had been active in organisations belonging to the far right. Many of them had been imprisoned for being ARC members, participants in the Aléria raid, and FLNC supporters. Opponents of the MPA dubbed it the 'Mouvement pour les affaires' (or Business Movement) because of its liberal stance and its supporters included traders and entrepreneurs. The MPA also created a clandestine organisation: the regular wing of the FLNC carried out its first attack on 26 October 1990, against the SAHA, a branch of the French ferry company SNCM, in Aubagne; this spectacular bombing was condemned by the FLNC.

According to the nationalist lawyer Marie-José Bellagamba, despite their ruthless rivalry, Cuncolta naziunalista and MPA could and should have complemented each other. Nonetheless, she believes that the two movements did not have the same political clientele: the MPA hoped for an expansion of autonomy in a European framework while Cuncolta naziunalista wanted independence, although not necessarily in a European setting. Bellagamba comments, 'At the time there was a whole debate, for example, regarding Article 74 of the Polynesian constitution, in which there were divergences. But their positions were the same with regard to language, culture, and the Corsican people's need for self-determination'.<sup>94</sup>

The Statut Joxe put into effect on 13 May 1991 with Law n. 91-428, which established the Collectivité territoriale de Corse.<sup>95</sup> The principle of an elected assembly with proportional representation was maintained but its dimensions were reduced (fifty-one members instead of sixty-one). The voting system was conceived to facilitate the emergence of a majority. Lastly, the executive organ was separated from the deliberative organ and the law established that the executive could be removed by means of a motion of no confidence. At the same time, the electoral lists were subjected to a general review to reduce suspicions of fraud. It should be noted that the bill drafted by the government recognised 'the Corsican people as a component of the French people' but this provision was censored by the Constitutional Council.

On 29 May 1991, the regular wing of the FLNC placed 100 kilograms of explosive causing an explosion in the headquarters of the Conseil Général de la Haute-Corse in broad daylight. Those not aligned with the

<sup>94</sup> Deborah Paci, 'Interview with Marie-José Bellagamba. Personal interview' (Bastia, 21 June 2022).

<sup>95</sup> Claude Olivesi and Jean-Paul Pastorel, J.-P. (1993). 'Corse 1992: l'année de la mise en place du statut Joxe', *Annuaire des collectivités locales*, 13 (1993), pp. 51–64.



programme of the regular wing of the FLNC joined the historic wing of the FLNC, created on 25 November 1990, which was linked to Cuncolta nazionalista. The FLNC-historique demanded the independence of Corsica and supported an armed struggle to induce the French State to negotiate as well as promote identity-based claims based on language and land. Against tourism development, Cuncolta wished to regenerate the mountain areas from which many of its members came and was distinguished by an intrinsic nostalgia for the past and a return to traditional, community values.

The Bastia section of the MPA, which was led by Léo Battesti, who fell out with the movement because he believed the struggle for national liberation belonged to the past.<sup>96</sup> He was convinced that the time had come for a civil peace to guarantee economic prosperity. In 1992, Battesti withdrew from political life. At the 1992 elections, the MPA received 8% of votes while Corsica Nazione reached 17%. Corsica Nazione was created on the occasion of those elections and was a multi-party group bringing together Cuncolta nazionalista, the UPC, the ANC, Per u paese, and the Corsican Green Party.<sup>97</sup> Although it was a minority within the nationalist movement, the MPA was very influential within the STC.

The 1990s were distinguished by infighting within the nationalist movement. One of the most celebrated examples of this conflict was the murder of the nationalist militant Robert Sozzi, who was killed on 15 June 1993. Sozzi, a member of Cuncolta nazionalista, had witnessed the death of someone dear to him during the Furiani tragedy. On 5 May 1992, one of the stands in the Furiani stadium, which had been erected just a few days beforehand, collapsed shortly before the start of the semifinals of the Coupe de France between Sporting Club de Bastia and Olympique de Marseille. Eighteen people lost their lives in what was later known as the Furiani stadium disaster.<sup>98</sup> Ten days before the match, the stands, which had a capacity of 600, were flanked by a new metal stand with a capacity of 9000. The executives of Sporting Club de Bastia and the club chairman Jean-François Filippi wanted to increase the stadium's capacity to 18,000 seats regardless of safety considerations. Sozzi did not accept the silence of Cuncolta and the historic wing of the FLNC on this matter. Cuncolta militants were accused by the dissident nationalists and by the national media of having wished to protect Filippi who was the victim of a failed attempt on his life at the beginning of the 1990s and had turned to the historic wing of the FLNC for protection. In 1992, the Ajaccio football club, AC Ajaccio, which was overshadowed by Sporting Club di Bastia, was taken over by a new management made up of members of the MPA (Alain Orsoni, Michel Moretti and Antoine

<sup>96</sup> Léo Battesti, *La vie, par-dessus tout* (Bastia, 2017).

<sup>97</sup> UPC is the acronym of Union du peuple corse created by the Simeoni brothers on 17 July 1977, after the APC which stood for Assocciu di i patriotti corsi, which emerged after the disappearance of the ARC on 27 August 1975.

<sup>98</sup> Julien, 'Les drames de Furiani', *U10* (5 May 2020) <http://ultimodiez.fr/2020/05/05/les-drames-de-furiani/>, accessed 25 September 2023.

Antona). As pointed out by Didier Rey, the MPA's acquisition of AC Ajaccio was part of a complex strategy intended to win municipal power in Ajaccio in the face of the coming local elections.<sup>99</sup> By finding this way of fitting into the city's socio-cultural landscape, the MPA hoped to win over younger generations to the cause. Filippi, who was considered the person most responsible for the tragedy, was assassinated on 26 December 1994 before his case could come to court. On 9 August 1993, during the international Corte festival and in the presence of the media, the historic wing of the FLNC claimed responsibility for Sozzi's death in the name of 'legitimate preventive defence'. For the first time ever, the nationalists claimed responsibility for killing one of the members of their movement.

According to official estimates, this fratricidal war caused around twenty deaths in the two years from 1995 to 1996.<sup>100</sup>

On the night between 10 and 11 January 1996, the historic wing of the FLNC held a secret press conference at Tralonca attended by about 600 balaclava-wearing militants armed with an impressive arsenal to announce a three-month truce. The announcement was made in the light of the visit to Ajaccio of the then Minister of the Interior, Jean-Louis Debré, with the aim of showing the nationalist movement that the FLNC historique was the only true interlocutor of the State. In March 1996, Alain Orsoni exposed an agreement between the government and the historic wing of the FLNC. Nonetheless, Orsoni tried to create conditions of conciliation with the historic wing of the FLNC. In January 1996, François Santoni, who had survived a murder attempt in May 1995, became the Cuncolta national secretary. At the end of 1996, he was charged, together with Marie-Hélène Mattei, his partner at the time, with extortion against Jacques Dewez, promoter, commercial agent, and owner of the Spérone golf course. According to the version of Dewez, his company had received threats from the historic wing of the FLNC. In March 1994, a squad of fourteen nationalists was arrested for an 'attempted attack' on the golf club. In October 1994, the Spérone golf course was raked by machine gun fire, and in November, a building on the course was destroyed. FLNC-canal historique took responsibility for these attacks. In an interview given by Dewez on 8 December 1996, he stated that he had received a visit from a go-between of the couple (Santoni–Mattei) and that this emissary, André-Noël Filippeddu, known as Gulliver, intended to return on 11 December, demanding the immediate payment of four million francs.<sup>101</sup> The visit was followed by the bombing of the golf course guard house. According to Mattei and Santoni, the real reason for their arrest was that they were the victims of a 'judicial elimination' orchestrated by Alain Juppé, prime minister and mayor

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Marianne Lefevre, *Géopolitique de la Corse. Le modèle républicain en question*, p. 12.

<sup>101</sup> David Dufresne, 'Le racket corse à la barre, première. Le procès du golf de Spérone s'est ouvert hier à Paris', *Libération* (18 January 2000). [https://www.liberation.fr/societe/2000/01/18/le-racket-corse-a-la-barre-premiere-le-proces-du-golf-de-sperone-s-est-ouvert-hier-a-paris\\_314097/](https://www.liberation.fr/societe/2000/01/18/le-racket-corse-a-la-barre-premiere-le-proces-du-golf-de-sperone-s-est-ouvert-hier-a-paris_314097/), accessed 25 September 2023.

of Bordeaux.<sup>102</sup> On 5 October 1996, the town hall of Bordeaux was involved in a bombing for which the historic wing of the FLNC claimed responsibility. According to Mattei, the negotiations led by Jean-Louis Debré had ended and the time had come for repression.<sup>103</sup>

By February 1995, the violence was rampant and a number of women from different political backgrounds came together to draft the *Manifeste pour la vie*, which aimed to put an end to this spiral of violence.<sup>104</sup> They stood for the rule of law, for life and against the rule of arms.<sup>105</sup> Quite a few nationalists believed that the women involved were being manipulated by anti-nationalist parties and, first and foremost, by the Zuccarelli clan, which marched with all of its family members during the demonstrations organised by the *manifeste pour la vie* movement.<sup>106</sup> On 26 January 1997, the regular wing of the FLNC broke up but this did not meet with universal consensus. Dissenters left the MPA to found the *Corsica viva* movement. On 6 February 1998, the island was shaken by the assassination of the Prefect Claude Érignac in Ajaccio, an event that brought it into the international limelight.<sup>107</sup> Three days later, Marcel Lorenzoni was arrested in the context of the so-called ‘agricultural lead’ and two months after that, it was the turn of his then partner, Fabienne Maestracci, and his brother, Maurice Lorenzoni. On 11 February, the *Manifeste pour la vie* movement organised a demonstration at Bastia and Aiaccio attended by 40,000 people.<sup>108</sup>

Lorenzoni was cleared of charges, and from 22 May 1999 Yvan Colonna became France’s most wanted man. On the previous day, at the end of an interrogation in Paris, four men had confessed to involvement in the murder, indicating Colonna as the perpetrator of the crime. At the end of May, the police charged Pierre Alessandri, Vincent Andriuzzi, Alain Ferrandi, Marcel Istria, Didier Maranelli, Martin Ottaviani, and Joseph Versini while an eighth man, Jean Castela, was charged in December 1999. Ferrandi and Alessandri received life sentences for murder, while the others received sentences from fifteen to thirty years for being accessories to murder. Andriuzzi and Castela were absolved in 2006 after the judge established that they were not involved in the crime. Colonna was arrested on 4 July 2003 in a shepherd’s hut near Olmeto.<sup>109</sup> The then Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, stated, ‘We have arrested the murderer of the prefect’. At the conclusion of the trial, which took place from 2006

<sup>102</sup> Marie-Hélène Mattei, *Le prix du silence* (Neuilly-sur-Seine, 2000).

<sup>103</sup> Deborah Paci, ‘Interview with Marie-Hélène Mattei. Personal interview’ (Bastia, 22 June 2022).

<sup>104</sup> Didier Rey, *Jalons pour une histoire de la Corse de 1755 à 2018* (Ajaccio, 2018), p. 395; Victoire Canale, *Et si nous montrions un peu de courage politique?* (Ajaccio, 2004).

<sup>105</sup> Jackie Lucchini, ‘Femmes corses, la longue marche’, in Philippe Franchini (ed), *Une dramaturgie corse* (Paris, 2002), pp. 123–37, at pp. 134–5.

<sup>106</sup> Deborah Paci, ‘Interview with Ghjermana de Zerbi. Personal interview’ (Bastia, 22 June 2022).

<sup>107</sup> Alain Laville, *Un crime politique en Corse. Claude Erignac, le préfet assassiné* (Paris, 1999).

<sup>108</sup> France2, ‘Manifestation après le décès du préfet Claude Erignac en Corse’, *Ina* (11 February 1998). <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclair-actu/video/cab98006322/manifestation-apres-le-deces-du-prefet-claude-erignac-en-corse>, accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>109</sup> Laurette Roland, *Yvan Colonna: l’innocence qui dérange* (Paris, 2011).

to 2011, Colonna received a life sentence even though he had always claimed to be innocent. Colonna became a myth: his face appeared on walls all over Corsica and his death, following an attack in the prison where he was being held, led to rioting and violent outbursts among Corsicans, including those belonging to the youngest generations.<sup>110</sup> In September 1998, Santoni resigned from Cuncolta because the movement had changed direction, becoming more pro-independence, as revealed by its new name: Cuncolta indipendentista. This change took place during the general assembly held in Ajaccio on 13 June 1998. The regular wing of the FLNC returned underground, taking the name FLNC du 5 mai. On 23 December 1999, the historic wing of the FLNC merged with FLNC du 5 mai and other secret organisations, Fronte Ribellu e Clandestinu in order to refound the FLNC. The next elections were dominated by infighting in the nationalist movement, which only ended in 2015 with the triumphant success at the departmental elections of Gilles Simeoni, son of Edmond. The previous year, in 2014, the FLNC abandoned the armed struggle and publicly announced its dissolution.

The 1990s saw internecine struggles within the nationalist movement, homicides and rackets reproducing the typical methods of clan clientelism. The violence was rampant and uncontrollable: 'the system has gone haywire [...] It's no longer clear who wields authority on the island and what the State policy is. [...] The poles of the triangle [clan, nationalism, State] have become blurred and terms like 'nationalism', 'democracy', 'rule of law' have lost their meaning.'<sup>111</sup>

## VII

The limits restricting contemporary Corsican nationalism resulted from the continued existence of the clan system. The militants from ARC, FRC and the FLNC accused the clans – the Giacobbi and Zuccarelli families in the north and the de Rocca Serra family in the south – of having adopted a quid pro quo relationship with the government in Paris to ensure that they kept control of the island, but, at the same time, condemning it to the rank of colony. Actually, if we observe the years of protest and demands in the 1960s, we can spot institutional actors among leading clans like the Giacobbi, Zuccarelli and de Rocca Serra families, who participated in a number of struggles together with the regionalists of the time, as revealed by the opposition to the planned Carbosarda and Argentella power lines. In the mid-1970s, when regionalist demands became autonomist then nationalist, the nationalists gained more acceptance among the people than the clans. As we have seen, during the cultural renewal of the *riacquistu*, Corsicans living on the island and Corsicans belonging to the

<sup>110</sup> Deborah Paci, 'La testa mora su TikTok', *Il Mulino* (19 March 2022). <https://www.rivistailmulino.it/a/la-testa-mora-su-tiktok>, accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>111</sup> José Gil, 'Corse: feu le «système» de la violence', cit.

diaspora were joined by a community spirit. They appealed to *corsitude* instead of *corsité*.<sup>112</sup>

Charles Santoni believed that island life was no longer distinguished by the fight between clans and that it was necessary to focus on safeguarding the Corsican people from the two-fold colonisation by the *piéd-noirs* and continental French. However, the infighting of the 1990s, the multiplication of nationalist groups and even the influence upon the Sporting Club de Bastia and AC Ajaccio football teams reveal that Corsica had never really abandoned a mentality based on community and clan.<sup>113</sup> It cannot be denied that on a rhetorical level, the nationalists had a vision of communion like that described by Benedict Anderson, 'It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, the political practice within the nationalist galaxy was dominated by a dichotomous relationship between friends and enemies, whereby enemies were traditionally internal (political families) rather than external (the government in Paris). As a result, the dominant rationale was one of division: 'everyone wants to win against the State, but also against the other communities'.<sup>115</sup> As long as the violence stayed within certain limits, the Corsican system was based on a complex mechanism supported by complicity between the clans, the nationalists and the State: 'The nationalists cannot unleash a violence that would turn against them or threaten the clans, and the State cannot enact a 'total repression' because the clan (and the people) wouldn't allow it. So the system achieves a balance whereby violence remains within certain limits'.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, the fratricidal war caused the breakdown of this mechanism and, if Marie-Hélène Mattei's interpretation is correct, we would have to accept that the government in Paris had fanned the flames of this conflict in order to negotiate with both sides, exploiting the dynamics distinguishing the clan system.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Dominique Antoni, *Corse. Corsica entre le statu quo et l'autonomie*, p. 21.

<sup>113</sup> Pierre Dottelonde, *Histoire de la revendication corse (1959–1974)*, p. 475.

<sup>114</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>115</sup> Xavier Crettiez, André Fazi and Gérald Lenclud, 'D'un passé aux possibles. Rencontre avec Gérard Lenclud', p. 168.

<sup>116</sup> José Gil, 'Corse: feu le «système» de la violence', cit.

<sup>117</sup> Deborah Paci, 'Interview with Marie-Hélène Mattei. Personal interview'.