

Mark J. Hill

Enlightened 'savages': Rousseau's social contract and the 'brave people' of Corsica

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Hill, Mark J., (2017). *Enlightened 'savages': Rousseau's social contract and the 'brave people' of Corsica* [History of Political Thought](#) 38, (3) pp. 462-493. ISSN 0143-781X

© [2017 Imprint Academic](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/69838/>
Available in LSE Research Online: September 2017

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Abstract

In the *Social Contract* Jean-Jacques Rousseau identifies Corsica as the last place in Europe capable of receiving his political proposals. To understand why this may be, this paper examines the historical and intellectual relationship between Rousseau's thought, enlightened European society, and Corsica in the eighteenth century. In doing this it identifies what was unique about the island, noting the perceived 'savagery' of its people, and thus, their capability to be given Rousseau's laws. It then examines how proposals from Rousseau's *Constitutional Project for Corsica* relate to the *Social Contract*, noting that the historical particularities of Corsica allow for further understanding of the proposals in the latter text.

Keywords: Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Corsica; social contract; enlightenment; eighteenth century; constitutions; Pasquale Paoli; legislator; lawgiver; political founding; human nature; commerce; religion; democracy

Enlightened 'Savages': Rousseau's *Social Contract* and the 'Brave People' of Corsica¹

In 1762 Jean-Jacques Rousseau told readers of the *Social Contract* that the contents of his treatise on the principles of political right were entirely inapplicable to his European audience – with one exception:

There is one country left in Europe capable of receiving legislation; it is the island of Corsica. The valour and steadfastness with which this brave people was able to recover and defend its freedom would amply deserve that some wise man teach it to preserve it. I rather suspect that this small island will one day astound Europe.²

This footnote is a signpost: if Corsica was the last place capable of applying the lessons offered by the *Social Contract* one should ask why. This is a question that has received remarkably little attention from Rousseau scholars, and which this paper seeks to answer.³

¹ The author would like to thank Laurence Brockliss, Christopher Brooke, and Jon Parkin who provided feedback on an earlier version of this paper. The current version has benefitted from comments by the anonymous reviewers at *History of Political Thought*, Robin Douglass, Mathieu Luzurier, Volker Heins, and the attendees at the Institute for Historical Research's History of Political Ideas early career seminar.

² Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 391 (Gourevitch, p. 78). All references to Rousseau are to the Pléiade editions first, followed by the source of the English translation when used (unless translations are the author's own). Letters come from R. A. Leigh's *Correspondance complète de Rousseau* (Oxford, 1965-1998). English editions used are: Victor Gourevitch's *Rousseau: 'The Discourses' and Other Early Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1997) and *Rousseau: 'The Social Contract' and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1997); and Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly's editions for Dartmouth College Press' *Collected Writings of Rousseau* (Hanover, 1990-2010).

³ Corsica is a topic in Rousseau scholarship which has received little attention. In 1959 F.G. Healey claimed that the project had only one modern work dedicated to it: E. Dedek-Héry's 1932 dissertation *J.-J. Rousseau et le Projet de constitution pour la Corse* ('Rousseau, Voltaire and Corsica: Some notes on an interesting enigma', *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 10 (1959) pp. 413-419, p. 414). In 1989 this work was still being referred to as 'one of the few extended studies' on the topic (T.E. Hall, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau: the Corsican

To address this issue, however, a historical description of Corsica is insufficient. Corsica, as Rousseau understood it, may or may not have been historically accurate.⁴ Thus it is necessary to recreate the Corsica Rousseau – and others – had access to by turning to eighteenth-century reports. In this way one can attempt to engage with the island using Rousseau's own methodology:

Just as an architect, before putting up a large building, observes and tests the ground to see whether it can support the weight, so the wise institutor does not begin by drawing up laws good in themselves, but first examines whether the people for whom he intends them is fit to bear them.⁵

This leads to the paper's second aim: by noting why Corsica was an ideal *situ* for Rousseau's political building we can then turn to the *Constitutional Project for Corsica* and, by comparing specific proposals with those in the *Social Contract*, come to understand what Rousseau saw as the practical implications of his own political ideas. That is, in addition to recognizing what was special about Corsica, by turning to the actual proposals he made for the island and recognizing how his ideas are modified (or not) when applied, one can gain more understanding of the practicalities of his political thought.⁶

connection', *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 267 (1989) pp. 199-215). Both Vaughan and Masters noted it as being important, but requiring further study (C.E. Vaughan, 'Rousseau as Political Philosopher', *The Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, 1, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1915), p. vii; 80; R.D. Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton, 1976), p. 411), while Hendel and J.C. Hall dismissed its relevance altogether (C.W. Hendel, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Moralism* (Indianapolis, 1962), pp. xiv-xv; J.C. Hall, *Rousseau: An Introduction to his Political Philosophy* (London, 1973), p. 8). This failure to engage with the text remains evident: The *Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* (Cambridge, 2001) contains two references to the island in the index, and Leo Damrosch's recent biography *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius* (Boston and New York, 2005) – stretching over 500 pages – makes three. When the island is addressed it has often been treated in tandem with Poland – the other nation which asked Rousseau to aid in its legislation (See: M. Canovan, 'The Limits of Seriousness: Rousseau and the Interpretation of Political Theory', *European History Quarterly*, 2 (1972), pp. i-24; N. Dent, 'Poland and Corsica', *Rousseau* (London and New York, 2005); R. P. Hanley, 'Enlightened Nation Building: The "Science of the Legislator" in Adam Smith and Rousseau', *American Journal of Political Science*, 52 (2008) pp. 219-234; E. Putterman, 'Realism and Reform in Rousseau's Constitutional Projects for Poland and Corsica', *Political Studies*, 49 (2001) pp. 481-494). The problem with this approach, however, is that it fails to address the particulars of each nation while attempting to develop a single systematic description of Rousseau's political works. Many of the works which have engaged with Corsica specifically have detached Rousseau's work from history (M.D. Mendham, 'Gentle Savages and Fierce Citizens against Civilization: Unraveling Rousseau's Paradoxes', *American Journal of Political Science*, 55 (2011) pp. 170-187; D. Schaeffer, 'Attending to Time and Place in Rousseau's Legislative Art', *The Review of Politics*, 74 (2012) pp. 421-441). Historical specificity, however, is important for Rousseau. The most useful works in this vein remain Thadd E. Hall's two historical studies for SVEC: the previously mentioned 'Corsican connection' and 'The development of Enlightenment interest in eighteenth-century Corsica', *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 64 (1968) pp.165-85 and, *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century*, 267 (1989) pp. 199-215).

⁴ D. Carrington, *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica* (London, 1974), pp. 265-266.

⁵ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, pp. 384-385 (Gourevitch, p. 72).

⁶ This allows one to recognize that the *Social Contract*, which is often treated as a piece of theoretical work detached from particulars, contains ideas which need to be tied to particular places and times. Although an entirely theoretical reading of the *Social Contract* is not universal. See H. Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to The Social Contract, 1749-1762* (Cambridge, 2007) and R. Whatmore, 'Rousseau

To address both issues this paper begins by reconstructing a historical image of Corsica. Reports of the island and its people are used to develop a description which would have been available to Rousseau. Following this, the paper investigates the island's relationship with the thoughts and ideas of the *philosophes*, drawing attention to their interest in the island's enlightened lawgiver Pasquale Paoli. This allows one to highlight what was unique about Rousseau's position by comparing reports on the people of Corsica with descriptions of peoples in his own theoretical works. Finally, a reading of *Corsica* and the *Social Contract* is made (specifically in relation to commerce, democracy and class, and religion). Similarities and distinctions, which emerge when the particular context Rousseau was addressing is foregrounded, allow one to see how Rousseau's theoretical ideas were applied in a practical manner.

Corsica in European Consciousness

Descriptions of Corsica from ancient history are far from charming. Strabo's *Geography*, completed circa 23 CE, described the island as affording 'such a poor livelihood – being not only rough but in most of its parts absolutely impracticable for travel – that those who occupy the mountains and live from brigandage are more savage than wild animals.'⁷ Seneca, who spent eight years exiled on the island between 41-49 CE, wrote to his mother: 'Can you find a hunk of rock that is as barren and craggy everywhere as Corsica is? Or more deprived of basic resources and with less civilized people? Is there any landscape more wild or sky more gray and gloomy?'⁸ The island may have been better off were it ignored for these faults. Instead, however, Corsica's history is largely one of war and servitude. From at least 566 BCE Corsica had been occupied by, or faced recurring raids from, the Ionians, Etruscans, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Ostrogoths, Lombards, the Papacy, Saracens, Franks, Pisans, Moors, and the Genoese – the last of who turned the island into an agricultural base in 1299 and made it a political dependency in 1347. For the following 400 years Corsica was plundered and the Corsican people abused. Many who could fled, while others became victims of the vendetta which flourished during Genoese rule. The rest worked in agriculture, the products of which went to Genoa. Other forms of commercial activity were either put down or monopolized by the Genoese.

To make ruling easier the nobility was dismantled and the Corsicans were locked out of any governance beyond local administration (and even this was due to Genoese disinterest, rather than concession). The upshot of this combination, however, meant the Genoese

and the Representants: The Politics of the *Lettres Ecrites De La Montagne*, *Modern Intellectual History*, 3 (2006), pp. 385–413.

⁷ Strabo: *Geography*, trans. H.L. Jones (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1923), Book V, Chapter 2 (p. 359).

⁸ Seneca, 'Consolation to His Mother Helvia', in *Selected Dialogues and Consolations* (Indianapolis, 2015), 6.5 (p. 187).

encouraged the 'democratic, collective system in the villages that served as a basis for the eighteenth-century constitutional experiments.'⁹ Carrington writes:

The rural Corsicans were left free to run their own affairs; the Genoese never swarmed over the interior; they remained in their six fortified towns on the coasts... When they interfered with rural life it was to encourage agriculture, and this campaign was sufficiently successful to create a new class of well-off, well-educated rural notables. These were however the very people who most resented Genoese colonial trade monopolies and became the most dangerous enemies of the Republic.¹⁰

Hall also picks up on this:

Genoa did not make the administrative and political reforms that would have enabled it to govern Corsica efficiently, nor did it make the military and financial reforms necessary to suppress rebellion. Consequently, its possession of the island was constantly threatened... Uninspired, inefficient, and oppressive, Genoese officials thought of Corsica only as a colony and did not attempt to make the island part of the republic.¹¹

Thus, when Corsica revolted in 1729, the uprising was far from anarchic.¹² Their experiences in self-governance had prepared them for larger democratic experiments. A national diet was called, demands were drafted, and issued to the Genoese governor in 1730 (which were promptly rejected). Protracted discussions continued, frustrating the rebels, for another year. Nonetheless, the Corsicans were able to maintain cohesion and in January 1731, Corsica declared independence, established self-rule, and adopted a constitution.¹³

This first revolt was suppressed in 1733 with the aid of Charles VI's troops. Having been left with the costs for having put down the revolt, while suffering embarrassment on the international stage, encouraged Genoa's new governor to be even harsher towards the locals; justice became summary, and lists were drafted of suspects to be jailed. Unsurprisingly a second rebellion broke out in 1734, and a second declaration of independence was made in 1735. While the Corsicans initially lacked the material supplies and international support for their revolt to succeed, their luck seemed to change with the arrival of Baron Theodore von Neuhoff.

⁹ Carrington, *Granite Island*, p. 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

¹¹ T.E. Hall, *France and the Eighteenth-Century Corsican Question* (New York, 1971), p. 6.

¹² The revolt is generally attributed to Genoa raising agricultural taxes under the guise of payment for corn shipped to the island after two failed harvests. However, this followed an incident of Genoese mistreatment of a Corsican regiment stationed in Finale Ligure (ironically there to quell any potential revolt). Thrasher notes that 'The Corsicans who served in the Genoese regiments were one of the few sources of national pride Corsicans could claim' (Thrasher, *Pasquale Paoli: An Enlightened Hero 1725-1807* (London, 1970), p. 32). Thus, the mistreatment, and ultimate execution, of a number of these troops raised tensions in Corsica before the tax revolt (Hall, *France and the Eighteenth-Century*, pp. 10-11).

¹³ Three Primates were elected (including Pasquale Paoli's father Giacinto) from the elected generals of the rebellion. They led a six-member junta and diet made up of a delegate from every village (Hall, *France and the Eighteenth-Century Corsican Question*, p. 11).

On 12 March 1736 a 'bizarre figure' arrived in Corsica, 'wearing a scarlet silk caftan, Moresque breeches, yellow half-boots, and a Spanish hat topped by a peacock feather.' Claiming his arrival was a response to 'oft-repeated letters' and the 'steadfast love and fidelity shown by [the Corsicans] for over two years.'¹⁴ James Boswell reported that: 'He brought with him about a thousand [gold coins], besides some arms and ammunitions, and made magnificent promises of foreign assistance; so that the Corsicans, who were glad of any support, willingly gave into his schemes.'¹⁵ That is, in exchange for aid he was able to have himself declared King of Corsica. The Corsicans did not embrace an absolute monarch, however. They required their new king submit himself to a diet of twenty-four members and a ban on making decisions related to war or taxation – as Carrington noted: 'True to their political inventiveness, the Corsicans had given themselves a constitutional monarchy.'¹⁶

Neuhoff's reign was short, however. After eight months, and having noticed how the 'people began to cool their affections towards him, and did not act with the same resolution as before [he] wisely determined to leave them for a little, and try his fortune again upon the continent.'¹⁷ While in Holland he was able to secure some loans, the funds of which he sent to Corsica, but he never returned to the island himself – he had a price placed on his head by Genoa which led him to 'relinquish his throne, and give up his views of ambition for safety.'¹⁸ He ended up in London where he spent some time in a debtors' prison, became an acquaintance of Horace Walpole (who helped secure his release and wrote his epitaph), and passed away in 1756.¹⁹ While it is reported that the short-reigning monarch had no long term impact on the island itself, his arrival re-invigorated the Corsican independence movement, while aiding Corsica's emergence as a topic du jour on the continent.²⁰

Before the 1729 revolt Corsica was essentially a mystery to the continent, 'nearly as unknown to Europe as California or Japan.'²¹ And while with the first revolt the *Mercure de France* began reporting on Corsica, it was with the reinvigorated rebellion and the momentary emergence of their monarch that Corsica became 'à la mode... [A]lmost month

¹⁴ J.T. Bent, 'The King of Corsica', *The English Historical Review* (London, April 1896), p. 296.

¹⁵ J. Boswell, *An Account of Corsica: The Journal of a Tour to That Island; and Memoirs of Pasquale Paoli* (London, 1768), p. 102. Interestingly, Boswell's five weeks in Corsica were aided by a letter of introduction from Rousseau, and although the text is largely a travel report, Carrington notes that Boswell was 'remarkably well informed' in those areas which he was not a first-hand witness (*Granite Island*, p. 266).

¹⁶ Carrington, *Granite Island*, p. 254.

¹⁷ Boswell, *An Account of Corsica*, p. 104.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁹ Walpole's epitaph can be found on Neuhoff's gravestone at St Anne's Church, Soho, London, not far from a pub which, until recently, memorialized the short-lived monarch by taking the name 'The King of Corsica.'

²⁰ Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', p. 167. Aylmer Vallance's biography offers this verdict on his rule: 'The man who became a legitimate monarch, and wore a crown through one hot Corsican summer, had something in him, no doubt, of the eighteenth-century gambler's fever [...] but, though he had certainly little to lose, he was not a madman but a clever rogue who succeeded, by sheer effrontery, in focusing, for a short spell, the limelight of European power-politics on his doings' (A. Vallance, *The Summer King* (London, 1956), p. 7).

²¹ Carrington, 'The Corsican Constitution of Pasquale Paoli (1755-1769)', *English Historical Review*, 88 (1973) pp. 481-503, p. 485.

by month the continent was kept up to date.²² There was plenty to report, as well: Genoa struggled to regain control over the island and France, who sent troops at Genoa's request in 1738, suffered their own embarrassing defeat. Control was restored in 1739, but interest continued to be piqued by Genoa's apparent weakness; Corsica, to some, appeared ripe for the taking, and interested parties included France, Spain, the Two Sicilies, England, Austria, and Sardinia-Piedmont.²³

Public interest was not entirely motivated by political intrigue, though. Hall has argued that 'curiosity about Corsican affairs was natural for eighteenth-century educated Europeans. They were intrigued by unknowns, and Corsica was unknown.'²⁴ He describes an obsession with 'unusual people,' such as the Turks, Siamese, Persians, Chinese, Africans, and American Indians, and notes that the Corsicans, with their uncivilized customs (especially the vendetta) easily fit into this category. Details reported crossed the spectrum from the mundane (the size of the island) to the extraordinary (Corsicans 'need only stones to fight'), highlighting Europe's ignorance of the island, but also a keen desire to correct this.²⁵ As interest grew new sources proliferated.

As reports from returning soldiers began to be circulated recurring themes emerged – most common being the primitive state of the island. It was claimed that 'nothing exists there, so to speak, and everything remains to be established' and that the island was 'in the cradle, and its infancy [would] surely be very long.'²⁶ In Jacques Nicolas Bellin's 1769 *Description géographique et historique de l'isle de Corse* it is reported: 'There are neither titles, nor archives, nor monuments in that country, which mark the turn from antiquity.'²⁷ It was not just the state of the island's infrastructure that was seen as underdeveloped, however, the people themselves were reported as: 'treacherous and terrible'; 'gens de mauvais fois'; 'gens sans foi'; 'extremely vindictive'; 'fierce, treacherous, and jealous'; devout believers of everything they were told by monks; capable of fighting wars with simply pitchforks and sticks; 'barbarous and illiterate'²⁸ – Frederick Neuhoﬀ – claimed son of Theodore – wrote that 'their knowledge consisted in knowing how to scour the country, to pillage, to take

²² Raymond Dumay, 'Quand Figaro 1er regnait sur la Corse', *Les Oeuvre libres*, 168 (1960), p. 85 (quoted in Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', p. 167).

²³ Carrington, *Granite Island*, p. 256. The involvement of France is discussed extensively in Hall's *France and the Eighteenth Century Corsican Question*. It has been argued by some (in particular, Édouard Driault and Louis Villat) that France had a long standing plan to annex the island, which Hall dismisses. However, he does make it clear that the island was of interest to many states during the eighteenth century.

²⁴ Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', p. 167.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 168-170; Carrington, 'Corsican Constitution', p. 485.

²⁶ Quoted in T.E. Hall, 'Thought and Practice of Enlightened Government in French Corsica', *The American Historical Review*, 74 (1969) pp. 880-905, p. 885; Hall, 'The Corsican connection', p. 208.

²⁷ J-N. Bellin, *Description Géographique et Historique de L'isle de Corse Pour Joindre Aux Cartes et Plans de Cette Isle* (1769), p. 69.

²⁸ Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', p. 170; Mably, 'De la législation, ou Principes des loix', *Collection complete des oeuvres de L'Abbe de Mably*, vol. 9 (Paris, 1794/1795), Book 2, Chapter 2, p. 172; Domenico Caminer, quoted in Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment: studies in a cosmopolitan century* (New York, 1972), p. 145.

good aim, and to form public ambushes. They were not less ignorant in whatever regarded civil society.²⁹ Again, Bellin offers this description:

The Corsican in general is deceitful, always trying to outwit and manipulate; it is this which makes it challenging: and if you want to obtain something from him, do not push too eagerly; stubborn as he is, he abandons nothing once a plan has been formed: difficulties, far from discouraging, serve to make him only more constant in his pursuit... He is full of superstitions, but charitable and hospitable for Monks and foreigners; living beyond his means; he will kill his relatives in cold-blood if they dare to contradict him: too proud to be given a penny, he will not hesitate stealing a pound... He is duplicitous with those who have what he needs; insolent and proud with those who need and cannot manage without him; greedy, not reliable, and lazy. His favourite hobby is vengeance, no cost is too high to succeed; it makes him labourious, patient, and liberal.³⁰

Their laziness was another repeated trope: 'Their spirit is naturally weak and inconsistent. Laziness is their dominant vice: they are so lazy that they have time for farming, but not for the sciences, the liberal arts, engineering, nor trade.'³¹

Frederick Neuhoff, again, writes:

The Corsicans are well-made, but meagre and swarthy: they have a good mein, particularly under arms, are sober, and have hardly any wants. They content themselves with the necessities of life, nor are the dangerous superfluities of luxury yet looked upon as necessities. They are brave, intrepid, dextrous, tractable, spirited, and lively; but, on the other hand, they are proud, presumptuous, inconstant, choleric, cruel, intolerant, forsworn, given to theft, more superstitious than devout, and so addicted to the visionary absurdities of sortilege and fortune-telling... They have little probity, and are so distrustful of each other that they travel always armed, and even go to mass with a musket under their arm. They delight in a wandering life, and are particularly fond of hunting: this exercise, inuring them to a coarse and hardy way of living, gives them robust and healthy constitutions, as well as savage, free, and independent disposition.³²

All of this taught them 'a thousand contrivances and other things which bear a near relation to a state of war; for which the Corsicans entertain a favourite passion.'³³

These are exactly the characteristics which prevented Enlightenment thinkers (in contrast to the public) from becoming interested in the island – Hall argues that the Corsicans were too

²⁹ F. Neuhoff, *Memoirs of Corsica: Containing the natural and political history of that important island* (London, 1768), p. 117.

³⁰ Bellin, *Description Géographique*, pp. 47-48.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³² Neuhoff, *Memoirs*, p. 16-18.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

violent, too superstitious, too savage – simply not enlightened enough.³⁴ That is, until 1755 and the rise of Pasquale Paoli, founder the Democratic Republic of Corsica.

Enlightened Corsica and Pasquale Paoli

Although born in Corsica, Pasquale Paoli was brought to Naples by his father Giacinto Paoli when he was fourteen. His father, a Corsican nationalist, noble, and general, fled the island after Genoese rule was restored in 1739. While in Naples, Pasquale studied at the Royal Academy, reportedly under the political philosopher and physiocrat economist Antonio Genovesi.³⁵ He was a reader of Thucydides, Polybius, Livy, and Tacitus, and it is claimed that, like Jean-Jacques, was particularly fond of both Plutarch (whom it is claimed he could, again, like Rousseau, recite from memory) and Addison and Steele's *Spectator*.³⁶ He was a cultivated young enlightened gentleman who took up many of the *philosophes'* causes.³⁷ He initially served in the Corsican regiment of the Neapolitan army, but was invited to return to Corsica by the island's four feuding regents after revolt broke out in 1753. He returned in 1754, and on 15 July, 1755, having united the island, successfully pushed the Genoese out of many of their strongholds, and elected General of the Nation, he declared independence and gave the island a republican constitution.³⁸

In 1766 the *London Chronicle* highlighted Paoli's enlightened successes, noting it was all the more incredible in light of Corsica's past reputation for savagery:

The Island of Corsica is now become an important object in Europe; General De Paoli having acted with so much wisdom and spirit, that the brave Corsicans are actually in possession of the whole Island, except for five fortified towns on the sea-coast, which are still under the dominion of the Genoese. The command which Corsica can have of the navigation in the Mediterranean must render those Islanders very considerable now that they have thrown off a foreign yoke, and are at last formed into a nation, having for so many years been so

³⁴ The Corsicans themselves were aware of this – when Boswell asked what he could do to return the favour Paoli had shown him on his visit, Paoli responded: 'Only undeceive your court. Tell them what you have seen here. They will be curious to ask you. A man come from Corsica will be like a man come from the Antipodes' (Boswell, *An Account of Corsica*, p. 322). See also: Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', pp. 171-173.

³⁵ Although it has often been reported that Pasquale studied under Genovesi at the Royal Academy, Venturi dismisses this as impossible – Genovesi only took his chair at the university after Pasquale had left (in 1754). However, it is possible he that he attended his lectures on ethics (*Italy and the Enlightenment*, p. 134).

³⁶ Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment*, p. 135; Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', p. 173; L.H. Caird, *The History of Corsica* (London, 1899), p. 138.

³⁷ Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', p. 173.

³⁸ The constitution formalized a General Diet whose members were largely elected by universal suffrage (initially) and were required to meet yearly, although Paoli and Corsica's government became more pragmatic as time went on. Paoli worked hard to maintain the consent of those around him, although Carrington wrote that 'while consistently proclaiming the sovereignty of the people Paoli often assumed the role of enlightened despot.' Nonetheless, his position, as General of the Nation for life, could be revoked by Diet. For more details on the constitution of Paoli see: Carrington, 'Corsican constitution'; Carrington, *Granite Island*, pp. 258-261; Caird, *History of Corsica*, pp. 133-142. On consent see Caird, *History of Corsica*, p. 142; Carrington, *Granite Island*, pp. 257-258. For a historical description see Robert Benson, *Sketches of Corsica: Or, A Journal Written During a Visit to That Island, in 1823* (London, 1825), p. 99.

divided into opposite parties, that they were looked upon by foreign powers as so many tribes of Savages.³⁹

In April 1767, *Gentleman's Monthly* published a manifesto by Corsica's Great Chancellor Giuseppe Maria Massesi, making it known to both the people of Genoa, and 'all the world,' that Corsica had emerged as a political equal on the European continent. Massesi offered a warning:

From the long experience of thirty seven years, [Genoa] ought to be persuaded and convinced, that she has not force sufficient to subject us again to her dominion; and that we are more than ever firm and resolved, to maintain, whatever it may cost, the rights of our ancient liberty, which we have recovered with the effusion of so much blood.

These were the events which led the *philosophes* to take interest.

The island's constitution gained the attention of enlightened Europe – resemblances were drawn between it and the constitutions of Rome, Sparta, and England.⁴⁰ Thinkers across Europe recognized one of their own in power and Corsica became 'the focal point for European pèlerins de la liberté' and Paoli was the 'hero of the enlightenment.'⁴¹ The famously cynical *salonnière* Marquise Du Deffand saw Paoli as the lawgiver who possessed goodness, truth, reason, and justice, comparing him to Horace Walpole and Voltaire complemented him in his *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*.⁴²

[O]n the domestic level journals like the *Journal Encyclopedique* carried Paoli's name to every quarter of the country, correspondents like Frédéric-Melchior Grimm made it familiar and famous around the courts of Sweden, Poland and Russia. In Italy Parini and Alfieri [...] were among the most illustrious of the generation of writers and poets who regarded Paoli as the Enlightened hero... Enlightened despots themselves swelled the chorus of praise; Joseph of Austria [...] frequently spoke of the General with admiration; so did Frederick the Great, whose admiration did not stop at words, but who sent Paoli a sword of honour with the words, 'Patria, libertas' inscribed on the blade.⁴³

Venturi noted: '[W]riters of the Enlightenment – more than is generally thought – were aware of the exemplary force of Paoli's rebellion and testified to it in their works.'⁴⁴

Interest was 'strongly influenced by an apparent similarity between lawgivers of ancient times and Pasquale Paoli' – he was reported as a modern day Lycurgus or Numa, 'leading his barbarous people into the full light of the civilized world.'⁴⁵ This allowed Grimm to write

³⁹ *London Chronicle*, 7 January, 1766.

⁴⁰ Carrington, *Granite Island*, p. 260.

⁴¹ K. Nabulsi, *Traditions of War: Occupation, Resistance, and the Law* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 204-205.

⁴² Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', p. 177.

⁴³ Thrasher, *Pasquale Paoli*, pp. 97-98.

⁴⁴ Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment*, p. 143.

⁴⁵ Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', pp. 173; 175.

that 'all honourable Europeans are interested in the fate of these brave people.'⁴⁶ This point is important: these allusions do not simply refer to Paoli – the people themselves are seen as being akin to the Spartans before Lycurgus or Romans before Numa – wild and unruly. In (what has been attributed to) Domenico Caminer's *Historical essay on the Kingdom of Corsica from the rising of 129 up to the middle of 1768* we find this description:

[Paoli] found an ardent and fierce people, all on fire in the cause of freedom but not sufficiently guided by established maxims. The Corsicans had been so long accustomed to bearing arms that they hardly knew the meaning of law and justice and were impatient of any restriction. They made Paoli undertake the great work of giving a new form to the government... Instead of forming a new legal code, he would do it gradually, according to the circumstances, the times and the temper of the people. He was always guided by the nature of the Corsicans and, like Solon, he could say that, if he had not made excellent laws, at least he had made the best that they were capable of receiving.⁴⁷

Boswell took a similar position. He described them as 'impetuous, violent and brave,' and wrote that Paoli, upon coming to power, 'found the utmost disorder and confusion' and that:

There was no subordination, no discipline, no money, hardly any arms and ammunition; and, what was worse than all, little union among the people. He immediately began to remedy these defects. His persuasion and example, had wonderful force; all ranks exerted themselves, in providing what was necessary for carrying on the war with spirit.⁴⁸

Importantly, enlightened thinkers did not develop any fundamental interest or concern for Corsica's fate until there were practical reasons for supposing that the Corsican character could be altered along the lines proposed by the *philosophes* themselves – that is, when enlightened conceptions being imposed emerged as a possibility.⁴⁹

However, the successes Paoli had secured remained at risk. His reign came to an end when Genoa, who had maintained that it had legal right to Corsica, sold ownership of the island to France.⁵⁰ The threat was clear, and on returning to Britain, Boswell attempted to raise political and financial support for the Corsican cause, but with limited success.⁵¹ In 1768

⁴⁶ Quoted in Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', p. 177.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment*, p. 145.

⁴⁸ Boswell, *An Account of Corsica*, p. 72; 133.

⁴⁹ Even after Paoli was exiled, and Corsica under France's control, discussions on the future of the island centred around the imposition of enlightenment values on the unruly population. M. Chaine's 1770 memoir, reflecting on potential reforms for Corsica, opens with a quotation from Fenelon's *Telemachus*: 'It is necessary to change the taste and the customs of an entire nation. It is necessary to give to it some new laws. Who will be able to undertake this task if it is not a Philosopher King?' (M. Chaine quoted in Hall, 'Thought and Practice', p. 885).

⁵⁰ The deal was struck in 1764, but only made public in 1768.

⁵¹ Boswell's text, however, did much in terms of public support. It was hugely successful, running through three English editions by the end of 1769, and was soon after available in Dutch, German, Italian, French, and a Russian edition was started (Hall, 'Development of Enlightenment interest', p. 175). A lengthy review in the April 1768 *Gentleman's Magazine* reiterates Boswell's claims, and concludes that his text glows with the spirit

Corsica was publically ceded to France, who once again sent troops to the island and the enlightened lawgiver fled to London in 1769.⁵²

Rousseau and the 'Savage' Corsicans

While it was the overcoming of the savagery of the Corsican people that brought them into Enlightened Europe's consciousness, it was the island's savage qualities which excited Rousseau.⁵³ In a fragment reflecting on the way they were portrayed in the press, Rousseau wrote that 'the Gazetteers always call them rebels,' but argued 'the Corsicans, rebels or not, are free and worthy of being so in spite of the Genoese and the Gazetteers.'⁵⁴ His concern was detached from any conceptions of them being rebellious, enlightened, or revolutionary – his interest was in them as a people. He made this point explicit in a 1770 letter: 'We will see that I was first to recognize a people free and capable of discipline, where all of Europe saw nothing but a horde of bandits.'⁵⁵

Rousseau's disinterest in Paoli's political actions led Carrington to argue that Rousseau 'knew nothing of the Corsicans' political system.' Instead, it was 'their struggle for national liberation [which] was sufficient to recommend them in his eyes.'⁵⁶ This is only partially true, however. Beyond Paoli's actions, and beyond the people's desire for liberty, Rousseau was interested in reports of the Corsican's savagery and innocence. To understand why this was important we need to remember the first problem facing a potential lawgiver: finding a people who can receive laws (in fact, it is at the end of this discussion in which the footnote on Corsica can be found). Rousseau clearly distinguishes between people who can be legislated for and those who cannot: 'Peoples, like men,' he writes, 'are docile only in their youth, with age they grow incorrigible; once customs are established and prejudices rooted, it is a dangerous and futile undertaking to try to reform them.'⁵⁷ The difficulty is finding a people 'which combines the stability of an ancient people with the docility of a new

of liberty and virtue. Venturi wrote that the text 'aroused enthusiasm, curiosity and solidarity in London. It was hailed by a section of the educated classes and by the more enlightened and open-minded representatives of the ruling class' (Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment*, p. 143). This is clear in the descriptions of the island found in Edward Burnaby Greene's *Corsica, an Ode* (1768), William Richardson's *Corsica: A Poetical Address* (1769), and Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Corsica* (1773) – of course France's involvement in the island around this time aided in English interest.

⁵² Paoli would return to Corsica for a number of years during the French Revolution, initially with the support of the revolutionaries, but he soon offered allegiance to England (the island became a British protectorate for a short time). However, he fled to London again in 1795 where he spent his final years, dying in 1807.

⁵³ It should be noted that Rousseau was not entirely alone in recognizing the Corsican people as providing a legislator with a particularly unique opportunity. The Abbe de Mably describes the people as having all the vices and prejudices which have distressed the rest of Europe, but also having a simple way of life; course, frugal, and modest. Importantly, he argued that Paoli 'did not take advantage of these favorable circumstances. Either he did not have what was necessary to be a legislator or his ambition, occupied with particular fortune, betrayed the courage of his countrymen' ('De la legislation', pp. 173).

⁵⁴ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 942 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 157)

⁵⁵ Jean Jacques Rousseau to Claude Aglancier de Saint-Germain, Monday, 26 February 1770.

⁵⁶ Carrington, *Granite Island*, p. 263.

⁵⁷ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 385 (Gourevitch, p. 72).

people.⁵⁸ Thus, those who already have moeurs and laws cannot be the legislator's raw materials.

Customs and prejudices are inherently linked to a people's laws – the constitution of a state is the morality imbued in a people when founded:⁵⁹

[T]he most important of all [laws is that] which is graven not in marble or bronze, but in the hearts of the Citizens; which is the State's genuine constitution; which daily gathers new force; which, when other laws age or die out, revives or replaces them, and imperceptibly substitutes the force of habit for that of authority. I speak of morals, customs, and above all of opinion; a part [of the laws] unknown to our politicians but on which the success of all the others depends.⁶⁰

Therefore, it is not simply an issue of habit. Once individuals have been made into a people it becomes difficult – if not impossible – to remake them. When a people exit their natural state and enter civil society their original natural *potential* for such sociability is lost. As Rousseau made clear: 'What makes the work of legislation difficult is not so much what has to be established as what has to be destroyed.'⁶¹ Thus: 'Anyone who dares to institute a people must feel capable of, so to speak, changing human nature; of transforming each individual who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole into part of a larger whole.'⁶² Once this transformation is complete, the solitary individual cannot be returned to, and a new social individual cannot be created. This was the state of Corsica. They were part of an exclusive club, populated by the dispossessed criminals and refugees inhabiting Rome before Numa, the violent and lawless thugs of Sparta before Lycurgus, and the homeless masses that were the Jews before Moses.⁶³ They were a rare people who were capable of receiving a constitution because they had yet to be given one. This is why he mentioned them in the *Social Contract*, and the following section will turn to the similarities between the Corsicans and Rousseau's ideal people to demonstrate this.

The Corsican People and Natural Man

Immediately before mention of Corsica in the *Social Contract* Rousseau asked his readers:

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 391 (Gourevitch, p. 78).

⁵⁹ This was not an idea unique to Rousseau – similar thoughts are aired by political thinkers from Plato (*Republic*, 540e-541a) to Francesco Guicciardini (see: J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975), p. 137).

⁶⁰ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 394 (Gourevitch, p. 81). A similar point is made in Rousseau's *Encyclopédie* article 'Political Economy': 'the most absolute authority is that which penetrates to man's inmost being, and affects his will no less than it does his actions. Certain it is that in the long run peoples are what government makes them be' (Rousseau, *Political Economy*, iii.OC, p. 251 (Gourevitch, p. 13)). See also his *Confessions* (i.OC, p. 404) and the preface to *Narcisse* (ii.OC, p. 969).

⁶¹ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 391 (Gourevitch, p. 78).

⁶² Ibid., pp. 381-382 (Gourevitch, p. 69).

⁶³ Rousseau, *Poland*, iii.OC, pp. 956-959. Although these examples are found in Rousseau's work for Poland it should be noted that they are used as examples of people who, like Poland, had been given laws, not examples of laws or lawgivers which Poland could receive.

What people, then, is fit for legislations? One which, while finding itself already bound together by some union of origin, interest, or convention, has not borne the true yoke of laws; one with neither deep-rooted customs nor deep-rooted superstitions; one which is not in fear of being overrun by a sudden invasion; which without taking part in its neighbors' quarrels can resist each one of them by itself, or enlist the help of one to repulse the other; one whose every member can be known to all, and where one is not forced to charge a man with a greater burden than a man can bear; one which can do without all other peoples and without which every other people can do; One which is neither rich nor poor, and can be self-sufficient; finally, one which combines the stability of an ancient people with the docility of a new people.⁶⁴

Two years after this was published Rousseau received a letter from Mattéo Buttafoco, a Corsican patriot and military officer. He wrote:

Our island, as you write so well, monsieur, is capable of receiving good legislation; but it requires a legislator: he must be a man of your principles, a man whose happiness is independent from ours; a man, who thoroughly knows human nature, and who through progression of time arranges for a future glory, willing to work in one era, and enjoy it in another. Will you deign in tracing a plan for a political system cooperating in the felicity of a nation?⁶⁵

Buttafoco had clearly read Rousseau – his description echoed Rousseau's writings on the legislator so clearly that, had it not been written to him, one could accuse the Corsican of plagiarism. He continued:

The Corsicans are near the situation that you set for establishing legislation. It has not yet felt the true yoke of laws; it is not in fear of being suddenly invaded, as can happen to other people; it is neither rich, nor poor, and can be self-sufficient; their prejudices will not be difficult to destroy, and I dare say one could link their natural needs with those of Society... You will find, I dare say, some virtues, and some morals with the Corsicans. They are humane, religious, hospitable, beneficent; they take pride in what they say; they have honour, and good faith; and if one ignores the particular case of vendettas, which at present are very rare, the examples of assassinations are less frequent than in other peoples... Among the Corsicans there are currently no arts, no science, no manufactures, no riches, no luxuries: but this is not important, since none of this is necessary for happiness.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, pp. 390-391 (Gourevitch, pp. 77-78).

⁶⁵ Mattéo Buttafoco to Jean Jacques Rousseau, 31 August, 1764. Although Buttafoco claims that this description – and invitation – was sent to Rousseau on behalf of the Corsican people, by this point Corsica already had Paoli's 1755 constitution, thus exactly why Buttafoco contacted Rousseau remains unclear. However, Carrington has noted that actual progress may have been slow during Paoli's time: 'The people who under Pasquale Paoli had operated the most advanced representative government of their time had not succeeded in building a single carriage road' (*Granite Island*, p. 8). What is more, Paoli never completely evicted the Genoese from the island. Buttafoco's own interests are also worth questioning as he would later turn on Paoli and support the French annexation of the island (for which he would be rewarded politically).

⁶⁶ Mattéo Buttafoco to Jean Jacques Rousseau, 31 August 1764.

Buttafoco did all he could to both flatter and pique Rousseau's interest and, although initially hesitant, Rousseau began working on what would become the *Constitutional Project for Corsica*.⁶⁷

While it is clear that this letter was the source of Rousseau's working relationship with the island, it is important that it came after Rousseau's reference to Corsica was published. That is, Buttafoco's description does not tell us what made the Corsicans unique, only that they met the criteria set out in the *Social Contract*. What is important for us, however, is that these criteria, as laid out in the *Social Contract*, are in many ways insufficient.

The section dedicated to describing the people capable of receiving laws in the *Social Contract* is found in Book II, chapters eight through ten. Chapter eight sets the problem of the ideal people for the book's audience. It is made clear that his advice is generally not applicable to the established peoples of Europe; that not all peoples are the same; that finding a correct people is rare; and that knowing when a people can be given laws is problematic (not least of all because the correct moment to do so only comes about once).⁶⁸ Chapter nine offers general advice on the ideal geographical qualities of the potential state. He notes that it must be neither too large for a people to united, or for a government to efficiently rule, nor too small to be self-sufficient. Chapter ten turns to population, stating that the ratio between land and people must be 'an appropriate ratio,' such that it is able to produce what is necessary to feed to the population, but also be easily defended. He explains that it is 'impossible to calculate a fixed ratio between the amount of land and the number of men each requires' due to uncertainties such as: the quality of soil, its fertility, local produce, climate, the temperament of the people themselves, fertility of women (and thus expectations of future population growth), and, finally, he notes that there are 'a thousand occasions when particular accidental features of a given place require or permit taking up more land than appears needed.'⁶⁹ Thus, what Rousseau offers are ambiguous guidelines – Goldilocks principles. Perhaps aware of this, he offers two further notes: first, that the people must be living in a state of peace; second, he once again offers a set of general conditions which a people need to fulfil. These are the qualities parroted above by Buttafoco. The problem is that these too are less than explicit – how does one know a people is 'already bound together by some union of origin, interest, or convention, [but] has

⁶⁷ Rousseau's first request was for more detailed information on the island, its people, and history (a request which was repeated when a Polish noble asked Rousseau to take on a similar task). Rousseau also did his own research, requesting, and receiving, a number of other reports. In October 1764, George Keith, the 10th Earl of Marischal reassured Rousseau that the Corsicans were truly the only people still capable of receiving a legislation that would be maintainable. On 7 November 1764 a report was sent by Jacques François Deluc in which he claimed that the people of Corsica were brave, honest, and the country itself was 'abundant in everything which can be useful and agreeable for life.'

⁶⁸ There are exceptions to this rule: people can be reborn through violent revolution or civil-war. However, Rousseau notes that those people who are exceptions must still be in a 'barbarous' state. Building on this point he offers the following maxim: 'Freedom can be gained; but it is never recovered' (Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 385 (Gourevitch, p. 73)).

⁶⁹ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 389 (Gourevitch, p. 76).

not borne the true yoke of laws' or is 'one which combines the stability of an ancient people with the docility of a new people?' What makes a people 'neither rich nor poor' or its customs and superstitions 'deep-rooted?'⁷⁰ Again, perhaps aware of his own ambiguity, Rousseau ends the section on the ideal people capable of receiving the laws outlined in the *Social Contract* by offering one further, and concrete, example: Corsica.

This suggestion, for this paper's purpose, however, is not entirely helpful. To explain *why* Rousseau felt the Corsicans were uniquely suited to the *Social Contract*, one cannot simply point to Rousseau stating that they *were*. Therefore, because the descriptions offered in the *Social Contract* are not, on their own, enough to make the relationship clear, one must turn to Rousseau's other theoretical reflections on the relationship between primitive peoples and the emergence of political order. That is, to further develop our understanding of Rousseau's thoughts on peoples, the following pages bring in Rousseau's descriptions in the *Second Discourse* – his most complete engagement with the history of peoples as they emerge from the state of nature – to compliment his ideas in the *Social Contract* and *Corsica*.⁷¹

In the *Second Discourse* Rousseau describes an era which he claims was the happiest and most durable epoch of human history. This era, which existed prior to political laws and formal institutions, owed its happiness to a number of features, but key amongst them was self-sufficiency. Although a key feature in Rousseau's other political works, the treatment the topic – and era – receives in the *Second Discourse* is of particular interest for this study and our understanding as to why Corsica was unique.

In the *Second Discourse* Rousseau hypothesizes that with the emergence of social sentiments naturally solitary humans are transformed. People came to live together in small

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 390 (Gourevitch, p. 77). Rousseau does offer one piece of concrete advice in this paragraph: be self-sufficient.

⁷¹ A moment must be spent addressing the *Second Discourse's* relevance to the *Social Contract*. Although published seven years later, Rousseau began working on his political treatise much earlier. In the introduction he notes that it was part of a larger work – the *Institutions Politiques* – which he began reflecting on in 1742 while serving as an ambassadorial secretary in Venice. Writing began in 1750 or 1751, but he gave up on the project in 1758, keeping only a portion of the text which became the *Social Contract*. What has been lost remains a mystery, though Rousseau does tell us that the relationship between a people and their government was the key consideration. In Book IX of the *Confessions* he wrote: '[M]y views had been much more extended by means of historical study of morality. I had seen that everything depends radically on politics, and that, from whatever aspect one considers it, no people ever would be anything other than what it was made into by the nature of its Government' (Rousseau, *Confessions*, i.OC, p. 405 (Kelly, vol. 2, p. 340)). The 'historical study of morality' is a reference to the *Second Discourse*. The continued relevance of this text – in regard to Rousseau's own ideas – is made most clear in the same chapter of the *Confessions*, where he writes: 'Everything that is bold in *The Social Contract* was previously in the *Discourses on Inequality*' (Ibid., p. 407 (Kelly, vol. 2, p. 342)). Thus, while a gap between publications exists, there is little evidence to suggest Rousseau had abandoned, or radically modified, the ideas addressed in the *Second Discourse*, and, in fact, ideas in the *Social Contract* may predate the *Second Discourse*. The upshot is that if one wants to find the most developed description of natural man in the condition Rousseau highlights as the most difficult to find – 'the simplicity of nature linked with the needs of society' (Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 391 (Gourevitch, p. 78)) – one can turn to the *Second Discourse*.

communities and language emerged. During this era people had only two interests: 'the comforts of life for oneself, and consideration from others.'⁷² The first was easily achieved before interdependence and superfluous need: 'Man's first sentiment was that of his existence, his first care that for his preservation. The Earth's products provided him with all necessary support, instinct moved him to use them.'⁷³ While Rousseau accepts that with invention new tools and conveniences emerged which brought with them new needs – needs which he writes 'had degenerated into true needs, it became much more cruel to be deprived of them than to possess them was sweet, and men were unhappy to lose them without being happy to possess them'⁷⁴ – nonetheless, so long as any individual was capable of fulfilling their own needs, true evil did not emerge. Importantly, a similar situation is reported amongst the Corsicans: Bellin noted that they met all their needs through farming and did not need to turn to 'the sciences, the liberal arts, engineering, nor trade.'⁷⁵ In fact, Rousseau in the *Preface to 'Narcissus'* noted that Genoa had purposefully attempted to destroy this form of freedom by instituting an Academy on the island.⁷⁶ By introducing science and art it was hoped, he argued, that superfluous and unnatural needs would follow, and that the freedom maintained through an austere self-sufficiency would be lost and the Corsicans more easily subjugated. The second interest of primitive humans – 'consideration from others' – was more problematically satisfied, however.

Following the emergence of sentiments amongst people – in particular love – jealousy took hold and discord followed: 'As soon as men had begun to appreciate one another and the idea of consideration had taken shape in their mind, everyone claimed a right to it, and one could no longer deprive anyone of it with impunity.' He continues:

[A]ny intentional wrong became an affront because, together with the harm resulting from the injury, the offended party saw in it contempt for his person, often more unbearable than the harm itself. Thus everyone punishing the contempt shown him in a manner proportionate to the stock he set by himself, vengeance became terrible, and men bloodthirsty and cruel.⁷⁷

Without recourse to laws, everyone had equal right to be judge and executioner in all things which they had an interest, and with natural needs being easily fulfilled the most important need was satisfying one's own self-worth. Importantly, however: 'From here arose the first

⁷² Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, iii.OC, p. 220 (Gourevitch, p. 219). One may think of this, again, as the mixture of natural and social needs identified in the *Social Contract*.

⁷³ Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, iii.OC, p. 164 (Gourevitch, p. 161).

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 168 (Gourevitch, p. 165).

⁷⁵ Bellin, *Description Géographique*, p. 49.

⁷⁶ Rousseau, *Preface to 'Narcissus'*, ii.OC, p. 967. Written circa 1752 – ten years prior to the *Social Contract* being published.

⁷⁷ Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, iii.OC, p. 170 (Gourevitch, p. 166).

duties of civility even among Savages.’⁷⁸ Without laws ‘the terror of vengeance had to take the place of the Laws’ restraint.’⁷⁹

Again, one finds this description of discord reminiscent the Corsican vendetta – even the socializing aspect of the act was noted.⁸⁰ Frederic Neuhoﬀ wrote: ‘they inculcate revenge as one of their first principles of education, and teach it their children from the cradle as the chief of moral duties.’ He continues by writing that they ‘are extremely susceptible of the slightest touches of ridicule or insult, and carry their vindictive spirit to such excess.’⁸¹ Rousseau oﬀers a similar description of the Corsicans and their ‘indomitable and ferocious mood.’ However, he notes that while this temper may be problematic, it was indicative of something more important: first, that it was natural for a people who had never been governed justly, and second, that it would vanish with good legislation. Rousseau writes: ‘The Corsican people preserve a large number of its primitive virtues which will facilitate our constitution a great deal. In its servitude it has also contracted many vices which it ought to cure; of these vices some will disappear by themselves along with the cause that gave birth to them, others need a cause to uproot the passion that produced them.’⁸² Their temper, he argues, was an example of the former, and thus, these vices were examples of the natural condition of a youthful people. Thus, these were not characteristics which showed the Corsicans to be ungovernable, but instead, the opposite was true: their ferociousness was both a sign of youthfulness, as well as a result of having not yet been governed justly.

Rousseau often reflected on the ‘correct age’ of a people.⁸³ In the *Social Contract* he wrote: ‘For Nations as for men there is a time of maturity for which one has to wait before subjecting them to laws; but the maturity of a people is not always easy to recognize, and if one acts too soon the work is ruined.’⁸⁴ This metaphor is carried over to *Corsica*:

There is in all states (peoples) a progression, a natural and necessary development from their birth until their destruction... One must not wish that Corsica be right away what it can

⁷⁸ Ibid..

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 170-171 (Gourevitch, 167).

⁸⁰ Whether Rousseau specifically had the Corsicans in mind is unknowable, barring new evidence turning up. However, it is almost certain that Rousseau would have been aware of their ‘savage’ reputation, and he did explicitly state that the condition described in the *Second Discourse* could be found amongst contemporary savage peoples.

⁸¹ Neuhoﬀ, *Memoirs of Corsica*, p. 19.

⁸² Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 917 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 136). With regard to the latter type of vice he notes ‘the inclination toward theft and murder which has made them odious.’ Legal solutions could be implemented to overcome these problems (Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 917 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 138)).

⁸³ For more on Rousseau’s metaphor of age see: G. Gershenson, ‘The Rise and Fall of Species-Life Rousseau’s Critique of Liberalism’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 5 (2006) pp. 281-300, and H. Gildin, *Rousseau’s Social Contract: The Design of the Argument* (Chicago, 1983).

⁸⁴ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 386 (Gourevitch, p. 73). This metaphor of a people’s age is directly linked to Rousseau’s use of the body-politic metaphor. For examples see: Rousseau, *Geneva Manuscript*, iii.OC, pp. 283-284; *First Discourse*, iii.OC, p. 10; *Contract social*, iii.OC, pp. 368; 372-373; 378; 424.

be (for it would not maintain itself at all in such a condition); it is better that it arrive there and that it ascend rather than to be there right away and do nothing but decline.⁸⁵

Again, in the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau wrote that:

[A]lthough men [at this stage] had less endurance, and natural pity had already undergone some attenuation, this period in the development of human faculties, occupying a just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our amour propre, must have been the happiest and most lasting epoch... The example of the Savages, almost all of whom have been found at this point, seems to confirm that Mankind was made always to remain in it, that this state is the genuine youth of the World...⁸⁶

There is an important note to be made here: the *Second Discourse* is not simply a discussion about the ideal condition of natural man. Instead it is a narrative outlining their decline. Thus, there is a risk that the Corsicans may, like the rest of Europe, stumble as they find their feet as a free people. It is necessary, then, to recall what initiated the end for this this happy historical state: agriculture and metallurgy.⁸⁷

Metallurgy and agriculture were the two arts the invention of which brought about this great revolution... [I]t is iron and wheat that civilized men, and ruined Mankind. Indeed, both were unknown to the Savages of America who have therefore always remained such; *even other Peoples seem to have remained Barbarians as long as they engaged in one of these Arts without the other.*⁸⁸

It was the combination of these arts that Genoa had prevented from taking hold in Corsica. Rousseau notes that the 'Genoese boasted about having favored agriculture on the Island [and] the Corsicans appear to agree with them,' yet in doing this the goal was 'abasement by attaching them so to speak to their soil, by turning them away from commerce, the arts, from all lucrative professions, by keeping them from rising up, from being educated, from becoming rich.' While he attacks their intentions, he nonetheless notes that they succeeded in stunting progress: 'The discouraged Corsicans abandoned a labor that was not animated by any hope. They preferred to do nothing rather than to fatigue themselves at a pure loss.'⁸⁹ Thus, there was little actual agricultural progress, let alone metallurgical science and industry.

When addressing improvements necessary for the island, finding a domestic source of iron was noted as being important (and Rousseau argued that there would surely to be deposits

⁸⁵ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, pp. 1728-1729 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 136).

⁸⁶ Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, iii.OC, p. 171 (Gourevitch, p. 167). This is not the only time Rousseau claims that this is the condition of contemporary 'savages.' Following the description of violence amongst natural people he writes that 'this is precisely the stage reached by most of the Savage Peoples known to us' (*Second Discourse*, iii.OC, p. 170 (Gourevitch, p. 166)). More reflections on apparent similarities are found earlier in the text (iii.OC, pp. 136-137).

⁸⁷ Corruption was finalized when these primitive peoples accepted the laws imposed by the rich.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172 (Gourevitch, p. 168). Italics added.

⁸⁹ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, pp. 917-918 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 136-137).

somewhere given the island's geographical make-up). Forges, too, would need to be established, and the skills necessary for metal-working would need to be learned, as these were amongst those things which 'the Island does not furnish now, but which it can furnish when better cultivated and enlivened by industry.' He warns, however, that 'one ought to set aside the idle arts, the arts of comfort and softness, the more one ought to favour those that are useful for agriculture and advantageous to human life.'⁹⁰

The importance here is not simply that there are similarities in structure or narrative between the *Second Discourse's* position on agriculture and metallurgy and Corsica's own history. The point is that without a system of internal interdependency emerging from specialization – without people having moved away from agrarian lifestyles – a natural individual freedom had been maintained amongst the people of Corsica. As Istvan Hont argued, the crucial point is that:

[Metallurgy] led to an escalation in the spiralling growth of artificial needs that characterized the history of civilization under the influence of *amour-propre*... Metallurgy gave rise to industry, a species of economic endeavor divorced from the land. A metallurgist did not produce food but exchanged his products for it. That was a huge step forward in the division of labor.⁹¹

These two classes would not remain in equilibrium as the industrialists could always produce new items and thus create new desires and needs. The outcome, as people turned their backs to agrarian life, would only be 'social collapse and depopulation.'⁹² This is the end from which Rousseau aimed to protect Corsica.

Again, the necessities of life for the Corsicans were easily achieved. Domenico Caminer made this clear in 1768: 'There are agrarian territorial divisions, not established by law but existing in fact. They live communally but there is hardly anyone who does not have some small plot that he can call his own.'⁹³ Carrington similarly noted: '[T]he Corsicans see no reason to work any harder, to grow more food, when they already have enough to eat, and that if they did they would have great difficulty in selling their surpluses... [T]here is no one to make them work all day: their land belongs to them, as does their time.'⁹⁴ By having dedicated their lives to agriculture and self-sufficiency – albeit by force – the Corsicans had avoided the next step in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*: the duplicitous rich imposing laws aimed at protecting their own privileges and wealth.⁹⁵ Again, this is a point on which

⁹⁰ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 926 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 144).

⁹¹ I. Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 99.

⁹² Ibid..

⁹³ Domenico Caminer, quoted in Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment*, p. 145.

⁹⁴ Carrington, *Granite Island*, p. 63. Thrasher also linked the Corsican lack of development (and thus the lack of time spent on arts and sciences) to Genoa's harsh rule (*Pasquale Paoli*, p. 30).

⁹⁵ Rousseau, *Second Discourse*, iii.OC, p. 177. Although one may argue that this was the role of Genoa, it must be noted that, rather than unite Corsica under common (albeit unfavourable) laws, the Genoese violently imposed tyranny over the Corsicans from afar.

Rousseau is explicit in his writings for Corsica – albeit in the guise of a history of Switzerland.⁹⁶

The island of Corsica, says Diodorus, is mountainous, full of woods, and watered by large rivers. Its inhabitants feed themselves upon milk and honey, and meat with which the country generously furnishes them. They observe among themselves the rules of justice and humanity more precisely than the other barbarians... Mountains, woods, rivers, pastures. Would one not believe that one was reading the description of Switzerland? Also was the same character that Diodorus attributes to the Corsicans not found in the Swiss: equity, humanity, good faith?⁹⁷

While the Diodorus Siculus text referred to – *The Library of History*⁹⁸ – is ancient, if the people of Corsica were historically stunted by the Genoese, the people described by Diodorus would continue to share characteristics with their eighteenth century descendants – and examples of exactly this are available. Boswell offers this report of his time amongst the Corsicans:

When we grew hungry, we threw stones among the thick branches of chestnut trees which overshadowed us, and in that manner we brought down a shower of chestnuts with which we filled our pockets, and went on eating them with great relish; and when this made us thirsty, we lay down by the side of the first brook, put our mouths to the stream, and drank sufficiently. It was just being for a little while, one of the ‘*prisca gens mortalium*, the primitive race of men,’ who ran about in the woods eating acorns and drinking water.⁹⁹

These reports (and those examined earlier in this paper) are what allowed Rousseau to claim that, helpfully, the Corsicans had preserved many of their primitive virtues. The point of this being, the *Social Contract* was written with a historic Swiss people and character in mind, and this fortunate character was also applicable to the ancient and contemporary Corsican. However, Rousseau also uses this comparison as a warning.

Rousseau notes that: ‘In general Switzerland is a poor and sterile country. Their government is Republican everywhere. But in cantons that are more fertile than the others such as those of Berne, of Soleure, and of Freiburg, the Government is Aristocratic.’¹⁰⁰ With wealth comes a loss of freedom and those Swiss regions which were unlucky enough to be blessed with fertile land were quickly corrupted by luxury. Even those attached to sterile land ultimately became corrupted, however. The Swiss had a natural character, one much like the

⁹⁶ Interestingly, in Rousseau's *Letters Written from the Mountain* it is stated that the *Social Contract* was based on Geneva's constitution (Rousseau, *Letters Written from the Mountain*, iii.OC, p. 809). Thus, Rousseau's ideal political system was built upon the historical example he presents to the Corsicans.

⁹⁷ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, pp. 913-914 (Kelly, vol. 11, pp. 133-134).

⁹⁸ Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, II.V.14.

⁹⁹ Boswell, *An Account of Corsica*, p. 286. The reference within the quote seems to be to Horace's *Epodes*.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 906 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 127).

Corsicans, which made them ideal mercenaries.¹⁰¹ The profit which followed this work gave them 'a taste for money [which] made them feel that they were poor; disdain for their station insensibly destroyed the virtues that were its work and the Swiss became five-penny men.'¹⁰² Again, Rousseau notes that 'Poverty did not make itself felt in Switzerland until money began to circulate there.' He continues:

Establishments of commerce and manufacturing multiplied. The arts took multitudes of hands away from agriculture. While distributing themselves unevenly, men multiplied, they spread out into countries more favourably situated and where resources were even easier to come by. Some deserted their fatherland, others became useless to it by consuming while not producing anything. The multitude of children became burdensome. Population growth sensibly diminished, and while they multiplied in the cities, since the cultivation of the lands was more neglected and the necessities of life more costly, which made foreign commodities more necessary, they made the country more dependent on its neighbors. The idle life introduced corruption and multiplied pensioners of the powers; love of the fatherland, extinguished in all hearts, gave way there to love of money alone; all the feelings that give resiliency to the soul being stifled, one no longer saw either firmness in conduct or vigor in resolutions. Previously poor Switzerland gave the law to France, now rich Switzerland trembles at the knit brow of a French minister.¹⁰³

Thus, although the Swiss' mountainous isolation resulted in an independent and robust character, the emergence of commerce ended their simple and uniform tastes, and a love of luxury led to the corruption of their people and politics.

The Corsicans, sharing much with Switzerland, are thus also vulnerable to these potential sources of corruption, warns Rousseau. He concludes his historical lessons by noting that: 'These are great lessons for the Corsican people; let us see how it ought to apply them.'¹⁰⁴ Before seeing how Rousseau does this – and how these reflections may or may not differ from those found in the *Social Contract* – it is possible now to answer the prime question this paper set out to answer: what made the Corsicans unique enough to be explicitly highlighted as ideal candidates for the *Social Contract*.

It is clear that reports of the island allowed for Rousseau to imagine a pre-political people akin to those described in the *Second Discourse*, a people who combined 'the stability of an ancient people with the docility of a new people.' What is more, having lived under the tyranny of Genoa, yet being divorced from any normalized legal system, they were 'bound together by some union of origin, interest, or convention' but had yet to come to know 'the true yoke of laws.'¹⁰⁵ Instead they relied on violence and vengeance to maintain social

¹⁰¹ Venturi, like Rousseau, notes this similarity. The Corsicans, he argues, had a 'fate which compelled them to serve in foreign armies as if they too were poor mountain folk like the Swiss' (Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment*, p. 136).

¹⁰² Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, pp. 915-916 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 135).

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 916-917 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 136).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 917 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 136).

¹⁰⁵ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 390 (Gourevitch, p. 77).

cohesion. However, while being united as a people, they were not interdependent. Freedom and equality remained, thanks to Genoa having prevented the emergence of industry and commerce. Finally, they also shared qualities with that historical people who had initially been given the laws contained in the *Social Contract*: the Genevans. Thus, unlike the case with the *philosophes*, it was not enlightened Pasquale Paoli who drew the Corsicans to Rousseau's attention. Rousseau was reflecting on the plight of the island by at least 1753, in the *Preface to 'Narcissus'* – at least a year before Paoli's return to the island, and two before the new regime declared independence and established their enlightened constitution. What is more, there is no mention of Paoli in Rousseau's famous footnote. In 1762 Rousseau was still writing about – and ultimately for – the 'brave people' of Corsica in the *Social Contract*. Thus, as Rousseau wrote on lessons for Corsica, 'let us see how it ought to apply them.'

Corsica and the Social Contract

At the beginning of *Corsica*, Rousseau notes that the islanders 'have gained much since they have been free, they have joined prudence to courage, they have learned to obey their equals, they have acquired virtues and morals, and they do not have any laws at all. If they could stay that way by themselves, I would see almost nothing to do.'¹⁰⁶ However, he also states that they 'have not yet taken on the vices of other nations, but they have already taken on their prejudices; it is these prejudices that must be combatted and destroyed in order to form a good establishment.'¹⁰⁷ Thus, Rousseau's goal – in addition to giving good laws – was the destruction of the prejudices of other nations. To do so required one to address the particularities of the island and its people – to come to know Corsica like an architect – and modify the principles found in the *Social Contract* to fit. That is to say, while there may initially appear to be areas of incongruence between the two texts, by foregrounding Rousseau's understanding of the island it becomes possible to recognize the relationship between *Corsica* and the *Social Contract* is one of specific application and, perhaps, moderation. Just as the imagined nature of the people of Corsica encouraged Rousseau to engage with them, this imagined nature also dictated how they would be engaged with. Therefore, the final pages of this paper will examine how Rousseau's own understanding of Corsica resulted in, and mitigated, his particular proposals for the island.¹⁰⁸

Commerce

Although Rousseau recognized the Corsicans as being unique, they were not perfect. As noted, they had begun to pick up the prejudices of other nations. Perhaps the most troubling of these was a desire to engage in commerce. As Schaeffer noted, the 'Corsicans had begun to lose their taste for the simple agricultural life and to develop an interest in

¹⁰⁶ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 903 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 125).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 902 (Kelly, vol. 11, pp. 123-124).

¹⁰⁸ The examples here are not exhaustive, but indicative.

commerce as a way of overcoming their poverty. This inclination had not yet borne fruit only because Genoese policies hindered commerce in an effort to keep the people poor and dependent.¹⁰⁹ However, Rousseau was explicit that Corsica should dissuade itself from such aims, lest they also embrace the domestic cost of commercial society: inequality, division, taxation, crime, depopulation, and the ruin of the nation. Instead, he told them to focus on agricultural self-sufficiency and reap the benefits outlined in the *Social Contract*.¹¹⁰

On the face of it, this is not a particularly surprising position for Rousseau to take. However, the careful reader of the *Social Contract* will note that Rousseau earlier argued that peoples who 'occupy extensive and convenient shores' should '[c]over the sea with ships, cultivate commerce and navigation; [they] will have a brilliant and a brief existence.'¹¹¹ That it so say, there is something about Corsica which would seem to almost immediately exclude it from the lessons found in the *Social Contract*. What is more, in *Corsica* he noted that Genoa had provided the island with a system which produced excess goods – ideal for a budding commercial society. However, he warned: 'It is not at all to your advantage to export them, but rather that enough men be born on the Island to consume them.'¹¹² Commerce would be necessary if the island were lacking in necessities, but when a state is capable of being self-sufficient international trade can only result in the import of superfluities – and with them, new desires, needs, and ultimately, forms of subjugation.¹¹³

Trade was not to be entirely abandoned, however. Owing to its primitive economy and natural conditions, some parts of the island produced goods in abundance while others struggled. Thus, while the island as a whole did not lack the necessities required for self-sufficiency, particular regions were less fertile than others.¹¹⁴ To solve the problem of regional inequality, and in order to most efficiently and successfully make use of what the island did have, some form of internal trade was necessary: 'The project of an evenly distributed population thus requires a circulation of commodities, an easy flowing from one jurisdiction into another and consequently an interior commerce.'¹¹⁵ To achieve this Rousseau proposed the state act as a central planner, organizing trade amongst the regions without the use of currency. A couple of important positive externalities would follow from this. First, by conducting transactions under a barter system, accumulation of wealth (as measured in currency) would be avoided and equality maintained. In fact, even were it

¹⁰⁹ Schaeffer, 'Attending to Time and Place', p. 422.

¹¹⁰ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, pp. 917-918.

¹¹¹ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 392 (Gourevitch, p. 79).

¹¹² Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 908 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 129).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 920-921. Rousseau does acknowledge the Corsican desire for wealth, but aims to temper these urges: 'crushed by a long enslavement, devastated by long wars, the nation needs to reestablish itself first. When it has developed its fertile soil it will be able to dream about becoming flourishing and giving itself a more brilliant administration' (*Ibid.*, p. 906 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 128)). He continues by noting that such opportunities would only follow the success of the initial constitution, and claims that these are institutional rather than constitutional changes.

¹¹⁴ For a description of regional production in Geneva at the time see: Thrasher, *Pasquale Paoli*, p. 30.

¹¹⁵ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 922 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 141).

possible to become rich, there would be little benefit to those living in Corsica where money would have little actual value.¹¹⁶ Second, these internal relationships would result in closer integration through mutual dependence. Rousseau concludes: 'Everyone must live and no one get rich. This is the fundamental principle of the nation's prosperity, and for its part the public order that I am proposing moves towards this as directly as possible.'¹¹⁷

The Church

Commerce was not the only vice which Corsica had picked up from other nations – one of the recurring themes in the reports examined earlier in this paper was the Corsicans devotion to the Catholic Church. This was not simply a spiritual relationship, however. While the Church was a theological guide, it also provided temporal support in the guise of political and monetary aid. As early as 1731 it took the side of the rebels by declaring the initial revolt just.¹¹⁸ Carrington noted that 'during the national rebellion the Corsican clergy, having repudiated the Genoese bishops, became less a religious institution than an association of militant patriots.'¹¹⁹ Elsewhere she wrote how the relative wealth of the clergy was invaluable to the rebel state. The Church was persuaded to melt down ecclesiastical ornaments to provide metals for the mint, to finance the university by a voluntary gift, and supply money to the treasury in moments of crisis.¹²⁰ This support did not go unnoticed – under Paoli's rule the Church gained representation in the general diet making the relationship with the revolutionary state structural. Thus, Thrasher has argued that 'the Corsican clergy formed, to a very large degree, a national Church. The priests were more concerned with their own villages than with any idea of a great and universal order. Their greater unit was Corsica, not Rome. Indeed, many of them closely approximated to that Savoyard Vicar of Rousseau.'¹²¹

What Rousseau knew or thought about this quasi-'national Church' is impossible to say. What is certain is that even if the influence of Rome had declined during the eighteenth-century the Church was nonetheless an important part of Corsican life, and, as seen above, the religiosity of the people was well documented. However, while this would clearly have been problematic for the Rousseau of the *Social Contract* (where he writes that Catholicism is 'so manifestly bad that it is a waste of time to amuse oneself demonstrating that it is')¹²² he is much less polemical in *Corsica*. In fact, the church is only mentioned once in his proposals for the island, and this is not particularly critical. However, he does not leave its power unchecked. Returning to the example of Switzerland, he notes that during the Reformation Protestant cantons found financial aid in taking Catholic possessions. He then writes:

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 929-930.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 924 (Kelly, vol. 11, p., 142).

¹¹⁸ Hall, *France and the Eighteenth-Century*, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ Carrington, *Granite Island*, p. 125.

¹²⁰ Carrington, 'The Corsican Constitution of Pasquale Paoli', p. 497.

¹²¹ Thrasher, *Pasquale Paoli*, p. 29.

¹²² Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 464 (Gourevitch, p. 147).

I do not say that the Corsicans ought to touch the revenues of the Church, God forbid! but I believe that the people will not be extremely vexed if the State asks them for as much as the clergy – already sufficiently endowed with estates of land – ask them. The basis of this tax will be [established] without difficulty, without trouble and almost without expense because it will only be necessary to double the ecclesiastical tithe and take half of it.¹²³

His position, once again, is pragmatic and keenly aware of its audience. The relationship between the Corsicans and their religious leaders was not one that would be easily corrected. However, in demanding financial support from the Church through taxation, Rousseau makes it clear that the relationship must benefit the state, and more importantly, that the state is supreme – there would be only one source of legitimate authority in Corsica: the people.

Democracy and Class

Rousseau's understanding of a legitimate political system was one in which the people would express the sovereign will directly. This would be accomplished by the people coming together on fixed and recurring dates to make this will clearly known.¹²⁴ Once the general will was expressed, the government would then act as the administrator of this will. Unsurprisingly, this was something which was best suited to small states where 'the people is easily assembled, and where every citizen can easily know all the rest.'¹²⁵ Rousseau explicitly states that size is a limit:

I shall be told that this may be good for a single city; but what is to be done when the State includes several cities? [...] I answer [...] that it is always an evil to unite several cities into a single City, and anyone who wants to bring about such a union should not flatter himself that he can avoid its natural inconveniences. The abuse of large States should not be used as an objection to someone who wants only small ones.¹²⁶

Thus, Rousseau's proposals were a problem for a large island with a dispersed population. What is more, his position on representative democracy – the simplest solution to the problem – was also excluded in the *Social Contract*:

Sovereignty cannot be represented... [I]t consists essentially in the general will, and the will does not admit of being represented: either it is the same or it is different; there is no middle ground. The deputies of the people therefore are not and cannot be its representatives, they are merely its agents; they cannot conclude anything definitively. Any law which the People has not ratified in person is null; it is not a law.¹²⁷

Thus, representation is not legitimate, and some form of direct democracy remains necessary.

¹²³ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 932 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 149).

¹²⁴ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, pp. 425-426.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 405 (Gourevitch, p. 91). This is a reference to government, but the logistics remain applicable.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 427-428 (Gourevitch, p. 111).

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 429-430 (Gourevitch, p. 114).

Rousseau notes that this is a problem in *Corsica*, and he must manipulate his principles to overcome it:

As I have said the rustic system entails the Democratic state. Thus the form that we have to choose is given. It is true that there are some modifications to make in its application because of the size of the Island; for a purely democratic government suits a small town rather than a nation. One could not assemble the whole people of a country like that of a city and when the supreme authority is conferred upon deputies, the government changes and becomes Aristocratic. The one that suits Corsica is a mixed Government in which the people is assembled only in parts and in which the depositaries of its power are often changed.¹²⁸

This mixed government, he seemed to hope, would still allow for the emergence of the general will – albeit expressed less frequently and never at once.

This problematic relationship between the people and the expression of the general will, however, likely worried Rousseau. In *Political Economy* he wrote that if you want ‘the general will carried out [you must see] to it that all particular wills take their bearings by it.’¹²⁹ Although it is unclear whether expressing the general will more frequently and completely – that is, whether participatory democracy itself – resulted in a more virtuous populace in Rousseau’s thought, without the people ever having the opportunity to witness the general will fully expressed, and living particular lives outside of the tight communities imagined in the *Social Contract*, it is likely that it would have less of a clear impact on the population. Thus, Rousseau moved to unite the general and particular in Corsica.

To accomplish this end Rousseau offers another, initially, alarming proposal: while in the *Social Contract* he writes that ‘the social pact establishes among the Citizens an equality such that all commit themselves under the same conditions and must all enjoy the same rights,’¹³⁰ in *Corsica* he argues for the institution of a class system.¹³¹ This is only initially alarming because it should be noted that Rousseau does not dismiss the utility of classes in the *Social Contract*. The problem was when such systems worked to counter equality and equal rights by linking privileges to particular families or groups:

When I say that the object of the laws is always general, I mean that the law considers the subjects in a body and their actions in the abstract, never any man as an individual or a particular action. Thus the law can very well state that there will be privileges, but it cannot confer them to any one by name; the law can create several Classes of Citizens, it can even

¹²⁸ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 907 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 128).

¹²⁹ Rousseau, *Political Economy*, iii.OC, p. 252 (Gourevitch, p. 13).

¹³⁰ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 374 (Gourevitch, pp. 62-63).

¹³¹ As noted above, classes had existed in Corsica, but this was another area in which Genoa had done the island a favour – Rousseau described the destruction of the hereditary class structure as ‘fortunate’ and he urges the islanders to ‘complete their work’ (Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 908 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 129)).

specify the qualifications that entitle to membership in these classes, but it cannot nominate this person or that for admission to them.¹³²

Thus, in *Corsica* he argues for states to grant class distinctions based on merit, virtue, and other 'services rendered to the fatherland.'¹³³

Specifically, Rousseau's Corsican class system aimed to divide all male residents into three classes: citizens, patriots, and aspirants. One would be able to graduate through these classes on merit: all those born on the island and below the age of twenty would be aspirants;¹³⁴ those aspirants who married and had property could become patriots; patriots who had two or more children, in addition to owning enough property to live off, could become citizens.¹³⁵ Importantly, all those who had fought for Corsica's independence would have automatically been granted the rights of citizen – as Rousseau wrote: 'It is very just that all these valiant men who have freed their nation at the price of their blood enter into possession of all these advantages and enjoy in the first rank the freedom they acquired for it.'¹³⁶ Of course, by awarding the nation's heroes the rank of citizenship immediately would have gone some way towards instilling the class system with legitimacy from its beginnings – a legitimacy which, ideally, would have encouraged others to strive to achieve similar accolades.

The aim of this system was to ensure that particular wills provided a positive externality for society as a whole. As noted, farming and population growth were Corsica's first two needs. However, without financial incentives to encourage excess production, and a mixed-democracy which meant the good of the nation – the general will – would be less regularly engaged with by the people of Corsica, Rousseau had to turn to self-interest as a method of uniting the particular and general will:

[A]ll the intentions of the foundation here tend to make this station happy in its mediocrity, respectable in its simplicity. Furnishing all the needs of life, all the public tributes without sales and without trafficking, all the means for consideration, it will not even allow a better or nobler one to be imagined. Not seeing anything above them, those who carry it on will make it their glory, and opening up for themselves a path to greater employments they will fill it like the first Romans. Not being able to leave this station, one will want to distinguish oneself in it, one will want to fill it better than others do, to make larger harvests, to furnish a stronger contingent to the state, to deserve the people's votes in elections. Large families well nourished and well clothed will bring honor to leaders; and, since real abundance will

¹³² Rousseau, *Social Contract*, iii.OC, p. 179 (Gourevitch, p. 67).

¹³³ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 910 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 130).

¹³⁴ The birth requirement is perhaps born out of the political strife Geneva faced due to its system excluding those born in the city from citizenship if their parents were themselves not *citoyens* (resulting in a class with no rights referred to as *natifs*). This was further complicated by allowing those with enough money to buy their way into the political sphere (by becoming *bourgeois*, which granted the right to vote and hold political office).

¹³⁵ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, pp. 919-920.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 919 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 138).

be the sole object of luxury, each will want to distinguish himself by that sort of luxury. As long as the human heart remains what it is such establishments will not produce laziness.¹³⁷

Conclusion

One can see that tensions appear to exist between *Corsica* and the *Social Contract*. Rather than break with his initial principles, however, Rousseau shows himself to be much more pragmatic in the manipulation of his ideas. In proposing institutions which avoid commerce at all costs, by limiting the role of the Church, manipulating his democratic system, and introducing classes, the ends of *Corsica* remain in line with the *Social Contract* – even if the means appear to occasionally stray. Importantly, what one finds in *Corsica* is not simply a restatement of his principles, but instead one witnesses them fleshed out in more, albeit particular, detail. That is, Rousseau's proposals in *Corsica* allow one to witness the workings of the legislator and the ideas of the *Social Contract* in action.

It is important to remember that anything one may learn about Corsica from Rousseau is accidental, if not incidental.¹³⁸ Instead, what is important to take from Rousseau's understanding of Corsica is that it was unique and 'in the fortunate condition that makes a good constitution possible... Full of vigor and health it can devote itself to the government that keeps it vigorous and healthy.'¹³⁹ By recognizing this, this paper has, through historical study, attempted to recreate the details of Corsica which allowed Rousseau to make this claim, and by doing this, come to learn more about his own conceptions of peoples capable of receiving laws – both in the Corsican context and more generally. That is, when examined through the lens of Corsica, this process allows one to see the arguments contained in the *Social Contract* in practice. While the proposals may differ, this is indicative of his ideas – as he always claimed – requiring manipulation when applied to a particular time, place, and people. Finally, what Rousseau did with *Corsica* may allow us to temper interpretations of idealism which have always dogged Rousseau.¹⁴⁰

Upon hearing of Butaffoco's Corsican request, Alexander Deleyre wrote to Rousseau; he asked whether the philosopher could in fact act as a Lycurgus or Solon, to embrace their deception and cruelty, and to move from general to particular.¹⁴¹ Rousseau was the last person who needed to be reminded of this – he was explicit in the *Social Contract* that the legislator's task was one which required persuasion rather than convincing.¹⁴² In fact,

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 925 (Kelly, vol. 11, pp. 143-144).

¹³⁸ As Dorothy Carrington noted, Rousseau's Corsica is distinct from historical Corsica (*Granite Island*, pp. 265-266).

¹³⁹ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 902 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 123).

¹⁴⁰ This reading allows for two further conclusions. First, in regard to Rousseau scholarship, which is always faced with the question of consistency, we may find further evidence of unity. Second, in regard to Corsica scholarship: while there is little to add to its own history, it does add to our understanding of the role the island played in enlightened Europe generally, and its influence on Rousseau specifically.

¹⁴¹ Alexander Deleyre to Jean Jacques Rousseau, 21 November 1764.

¹⁴² For more on this aspect of Rousseau's legislator see: C. Kelly, "'To Persuade without Convincing": The Language of Rousseau's Legislator', *American Journal of Political Science*, 31 (1987) pp. 321-335.

Rousseau did seem reluctant when it came to taking the steps he had imagined necessary in his earlier work – and this may be where *Corsica* breaks away from the *Social Contract* most clearly:

Although I know that the Corsican nation has prejudices very contrary to my principles, my intention is not at all to employ the art of persuading in order to make them adopt them. On the contrary I want to tell them my opinion and my reasons with such simplicity that there is nothing in it that can seduce them, because it is very possible that I am mistaken and I would be very sorry for them to adopt my sentiment to their harm.¹⁴³

It is perhaps for this reason – Rousseau's fear to embrace his own legislative techniques and fear that his proposals may be mistaken – that *Corsica*, which was completed in 1765, four years before the island fell to France, was never made available. Perhaps it was a task which he was not prepared to embrace fully, and in that sense, for all its pragmatism, remained strictly theoretical.

¹⁴³ Rousseau, *Corsica*, iii.OC, p. 947 (Kelly, vol. 11, p. 162). For more on the necessity of consent see: *Social Contract*, iii.OC, pp. 365; 368; *Corsica*, iii.OC, pp. 918; 942.