

Anonymous introductions: identity and belonging in Corsica

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This article starts from an ethnographic puzzle: why do first encounters between strangers in a village in the north of Corsica often not include the interlocutors' names? This puzzle is unpacked with the help of recent work on the anthropology of belonging, combined with selected insights from French sociologist Gabriel Tarde. What starts off as an account of relationality and personhood in Corsica becomes a reconfiguration of anthropology's approach to identity and difference, through the prism of Tarde's call to replace the problematic of 'Being' with an examinations of ways of 'having'. 'Anonymous introductions', which bracket the question of personal identity in order to make connections emerge, are considered as a model for a reconfigured anthropological heuristic.

Is hospitality a question asked of he who arrives ...: what are you called? Tell me your name, what should I call you, I who call you, I who desire to call you by your name? ... Or does hospitality begin in a welcome without a question, in a double erasure, an erasure of the question and of the name?

Jacques Derrida, De l'hospitalité (1997)

Anonymous introductions

Anthropologists working in Corsica have often noted that personal introductions on the island turn on the evocation of people and places which the interlocutors 'have in common' (Jaffe 1999: 58; Ravis-Giordani 1983). When the two people meeting are Corsican, this will include questions about one's village of origin, leading, if the village is known, to discussion of one's family. By contrast, non-Corsicans, such as the many continental French people residing in or visiting the island, are not expected to 'have' a village. In their case, introductions might move from one's home town, to one's place of residence in Corsica, and finally one's Corsican acquaintances there; these will be examined fairly relentlessly until a commonality is found: a place or preferably a person whom both interlocutors know. Alexandra Jaffe identifies this as a 'classic Corsican encounter ritual' (1999: 58). As Georges Ravis-Giordani puts it, at the end of such introductions, 'the stranger is no longer unknown (un inconnu), he is situated in a network, of which his interlocutors hold a few strands' (1983: 228).

In my own ethnographic experience in the north Corsican village of Crucetta, however, I encountered a feature that the above literature does not mention: the one

name one was *not* likely to hear throughout this process of evocation of people and places was one's interlocutor's. In the early stages of fieldwork, I often introduced myself by name to people I had met in bars or squares, only to find that, contrary to what I expected, no name was offered in return, and conversation simply proceeded from there. I thus came to know people for weeks, exchange life-histories, discuss important topics, and never once had them introduce themselves by name. As a result, my fieldnotes, particularly from the early days, are full of contextual designations such as 'the man with the cats', 'upstairs neighbour of Jean-Marie', and so on. This kind of 'anonymous introduction' did not, of course, happen every time I met someone new, and formal exchange of names was the norm in many contexts, such as when visiting someone at their home or in most settings implicitly deemed 'official' or 'professional'. Yet it happened enough in the early days of fieldwork for me to notice it, and in time, I myself stopped proffering my name as an opening gambit on first meetings with people in the bars and squares of Crucetta.

The notion of an 'anonymous introduction' conjures up the tantalizing promise of a new anthropological object. Yet at the risk of disappointing some readers, the article does not claim to have uncovered a specifically Corsican ritual of introduction, with its standard proprieties and rules. Rather more modestly – although the conclusion will show that there is more than just modesty involved – I will use 'anonymous introductions' in this article as a shorthand for a more loosely defined object: not a formal 'cultural practice' but a tendency, an orientation towards name-avoidance in initial encounters. This tendency towards name-avoidance was also present in less 'extreme' cases, in which the interlocutor's name would eventually be mentioned, but only at the end of a conversation, as in the following example.

I was returning from a morning walk to the nearby village of Sant-Antoninu when I crossed paths with an elderly man wearing blue dungarees, a checked shirt, and cloth cap. He was carrying a white plastic bag, of the supermarket variety, and his muddy shoes spoke of a recent trip into a field. Emboldened by his friendly look, I decided to attempt a greeting in my fledgeling Corsican, and said 'Salute!' He replied in the same language and we exchanged pleasantries about the weather. He asked where I was heading, and I answered I had just been on a walk and was heading back to Crucetta. He said, 'Ah, so you are staying in Crucetta?' I replied rather clumsily in my struggling Corsican that I was 'from Crucetta, well, no I mean I'm not *from* there, but I live there'. He gestured slightly impatiently at this, as if to say of course you're not from there, and looked at me quizzically. So I explained that I was a student from England who had come to work on Corsican bilingual schooling. He clapped his hand to his mouth in genuine astonishment at this and said, rather hurriedly: 'I'm sorry, I had taken you for a Corsican, because you saluted me - I thought "He's Corsican", so I spoke to you in Corsican'. He seemed to think this had been over-familiar, but I replied that, on the contrary, I was trying to learn Corsican so every little helped. I tried to launch a discussion on this topic, but he had not quite finished with me and asked me where in Crucetta I was staying. I told him the name of the neighbourhood, Piazza à O, and he said he knew it well. I ventured the name of my friend Petru, a locally famous shepherd. My interlocutor was very pleased at this and asked for news of Petru, whom he described as a good friend. We spoke of Crucetta, Petru, and Piazza à O for a while. As we parted, my interlocutor asked me to give Petru a good day from him. 'You'll say "Saveriu the shepherd, savs hello, Saveriu from Sant'Antoninu (Saveriu di Sant'Antoninu)" '.

Saveriu's name, therefore, far from being an opening gambit, was the very last thing he told me, and without any expectation that I would offer my name in return. This was not an isolated case. Such offers of names often came at the end of long conversations, at parting, and in relation to a third party: 'You'll tell Pascal that you met me. Didier, I'm Didier', or 'Tell him that Guy – that's me – still remembers that school play we did'. In none of these cases was I expected to reciprocate. Far from being foundational to the encounter or in any sense a preliminary, this mention of a name was a supplement, an afterthought which was prompted by, and in a sense addressed to, a third party. Up until then, the introduction had been anonymous.

This tendency towards name-avoidance was cast into stark relief for me one afternoon by an encounter situation which ostensibly 'failed'. This happened ten months into my time in Crucetta, as I sat with half a dozen neighbours under the large tree in the local square, including Cécile, a Parisian woman who had bought a house in the neighbourhood. I was vaguely strumming on a guitar, and joining in the desultory chat, interrupted only by the scraping noise of steel chairs as one or other of us moved to follow the shade.

An elderly lady from another neighbourhood came up and joined us. All of the people there apart from Cécile and me were villagers who knew her well, and she was greeted in the nonchalant and minimalist way reserved for close associates. The new arrival sat by Marie-Josée, wife to the above-mentioned Petru, who explained to her in Corsican that I was a student who had come here to study the village and told her where I lived.

Having been thus introduced, I then intervened in the same language: 'Yes, I'm staying over there, near the path to the little cross'. The new arrival noted, with kindly admiration, 'and he speaks Corsican, too!' I smiled a 'thanks'. After a while, Cécile, the only person there not to speak Corsican, asked the lady in French, 'Excuse me, but, what's your name?' The lady, and the rest of the company, stared at her in silence. Cécile continued, hesitantly: 'Er ... you wouldn't by any chance, erm ... be Madame Mattei? ...' (Mattei is the single most common patronym in Crucetta). After another long stare, the lady finally answered, with icy dignity: 'No, Madame Mattei was my mother. I used to be a Mattei'. But she firmly did not give her name. A rather embarrassed silence ensued. Cécile pursued: 'Do you look much like her? ... Your mother?' No answer, perhaps a vague shrug. Cécile: 'And so do you ... do you live in the village?' The lady answered 'yes', so much as to say 'of course'. Cécile then went on to explain confusedly that she had long ago briefly met a Madame Mattei, and hence was wondering whether they were the same person. Her explanation fell flat. I started a tune to change the conversation.

Partial explanations

Two related anthropological traditions provide ready frameworks for contextualizing such encounter situations. The first is the classic community studies approach, which might lead us to ask about the proprieties of introduction, hospitality, and the management of interpersonal knowledge. Like other Mediterranean locations (Campbell 1964; Pitt-Rivers 1954), Corsica has yielded careful studies of small-scale communities of face-to-face interaction (e.g. Caisson 1978; Chiva 1963; Ravis-Giordani 1983) suggesting a deft balance between an ideology of reciprocity and equality, on the one hand, and contests for power and political influence over extended kin-based networks, on the other. This is a context in which public displays of autonomy are the flip-side of an expectation of unfailing corporate solidarity (Gil 1984). Corsican villages emerge as places in which 'honour' was negotiated before the agonistic public of the square and through the intimate secrecy of the house, spaces in which the individual self-other encounter harked back to confrontations between kinship groups, and where, as a result, relationships had to be micro-managed: '[P]eople outside the immediate family should not necessarily be trusted, and information restricted to the smallest possible unit' (Jaffe 1999: 47). Recent authors have continued to speak of 'the Corsican "method" of mistrust of the other's gaze and of discretion in regards to speech ... To say too much is harmful, one must not say what one knows, betray secrets; but also: one should not ask' (Galibert 2004*a*: 6-7).

In this tradition, a general sense of reticence in initial encounters with strangers might be thought to express a tension between the principles of hospitality, which requires opening to the outsider, and honour, which requires controlling public knowledge of the family to maintain reputation (e.g. Ravis-Giordani 1983: 228-9, 374-8; cf. Caisson 1974).² There is much to be retained from these earlier community studies, as I will argue below, and in many ways this article builds on this tradition. And yet the question of 'secrecy' does not quite get to the bottom of name-avoidance *per se*.

Certainly, introductions I have witnessed in Crucetta (and indeed pretty much everywhere else) involve a delicate diplomacy in which the information one gives, implies, or hides is always carefully managed. As I have argued elsewhere (Candea 2010: chap. 5), the crucial fact of whether one is or is not Corsican, for instance, is rarely explicitly articulated, but rather politely guessed at through implicit clues. However, names in the above cases did not constitute particularly privileged or valuable information, as is made manifest by the ease with which they could in fact be given where 'relevant' (as in Toninu's case) - if anything, as I will show below, they were fairly devoid of signification to an outsider. In Cécile's example, the negative reaction to a stranger demanding to know your name seems to suggest this kind of economy of secrecy (also described for other French rural locations, e.g. Zonabend 1990). And yet it is notable that the lady's proud response that she 'used to be a Mattei' was as revealing of family histories and her 'private life', if not more, than a simple answer concerning her patronym would have been. This all suggests that it is not so much the content of the information which matters here as the act of suppressing it or explicitly asking for it. Name-avoidance in these encounters was therefore not, I will argue, about the management of sensitive information, but rather about indirectness – the relevance of this distinction will become clearer as I proceed.

The second anthropological tradition is a more recent focus on 'identity and difference'; this might take as its starting-point the fact that one of the protagonists in each of these stories is not Corsican, and ask about boundary-maintenance, cultural stereotyping, and insider-outsider relations.

Corsica lies just north of Sardinia and fifty miles west of the coast of Tuscany. The fourth largest Mediterranean island after Sicily, Sardinia, and Cyprus, its population of about 250,000 permanent residents makes it one of the least densely populated areas of France. Corsica has been a part of France since 1768, after a brief period as an independent republic in the mid-eighteenth century. The island's disputed historical position in the French national order of things has led to vigorous intellectual public debate around issues of identity. As in other French regions, post-1960s regionalists have been engaging in a performative rediscovery of Corsican language and culture (Jaffe 1999; McKechnie 1993), while nationalist parties and underground resistance movements made more explicitly political and in some cases violent claims against the French state

(for a comprehensive English-language study of Corsican nationalism, see Loughlin 1989; for later developments, see Hossay 2004).

More recently, discussions of identity have been complicated by the sometimes uneasy presence of labour migrants from North Africa (Candea 2006), while old houses left empty in the heart of villages by rural exodus are being bought up as second homes by continental French families, within a broader context of mass tourism which has become one of the island's prime economic drivers. In the margins of a conceptually refined public debate over identity, in which, whether one is a Corsican nationalist or a French 'républicain', openness to the other is usually an explicit element of selfdefinition, there has also been, as elsewhere in Europe, a harvest of simpler 'cultural essentialisms' and 'cultural anxieties' (Grillo 2003; cf. Stolcke 1995).

It is perhaps not surprising in this context that the occasional incidence of uncomfortable and stilted interactions, such as that described above in the square, finds a ready explanation, particularly in the eyes of Continentals, in a broader narrative about Corsica's difference from (the rest of) France. In the popular anthropology of tourists, visitors, and some Corsicans, such moments are often understood as revelatory of something deep-seated about Corsican culture or mentality, namely an oft-cited Corsican propensity to 'closedness', 'taciturnity', or (again) 'secrecy'. Some go so far as to portray the island as a whole as closed and 'xenophobic', as, to quote one French television programme, 'an island that is afraid of the Other' (see Candea 2006).

Recent anthropologists of Corsica have challenged such depictions of a 'closed' island by making what is perhaps the quintessential anthropological move, in line with the earlier community studies accounts: stressing the relational nature of self-other distinctions (Desanti 1997; Desideri 1997; Galibert 2004b; see also Ravis-Giordani 1983: 231). Whilst they acknowledge the passionate attachment of Corsicans to their island, these authors argue that such identities are articulated and reinforced by opposition to, and therefore in a relationship with, others. Thus, for instance, Charlie Galibert notes, quoting Cassano, that

for the islander, 'the frontier is sacred because it preserves the relation between identity and difference, insofar as this relation constructs-identifies a community by opposition to others, to all the others' (Cassano, 1998, p. 63). For the islander, the elsewhere is already here, because the island can only exist in its relationship to the other, to the continent, to the rest of the world (Galibert 2004b: 27).

This approach too, is to a great extent compelling. And yet its emphasis on selves and others leaves unanswered precisely the question which is relevant to anonymous intoductions: Could this line ever be breached? How might an outsider become an insider? This is a problem of introduction in the etymological sense of insertion, of leading inside, as in the introduction of one thing into another - here, of one person into a collective entity or relational assemblage. In order to see how anonymous introductions might do this, we need to suspend for a moment the self-other, me/not-me logic which informs both the community studies approach and more recent accounts of identity and difference. In order to do this, it is time to enlist the help of a long-dead French sociologist.

Theoretical interlude: Gabriel Tarde and the anthropology of belonging

From Fredrik Barth (1969) onwards, anthropologists have tended to consider identity through the prism of categories, boundaries, and the relation of parts to wholes. The

questions raised in this tradition are formulated in terms of the conceptual and pragmatic separation and mix of categories (cultures, nations, ethnic groups, etc.): How do these categories interact? Are they articulated in peaceful or in violent ways? Is identity articulated through the construction of difference, or the denial of resemblance? How are such categories lived in and embodied by individuals (see, e.g., Barth 1969; Baumann 1999; Grillo 2003; Harrison 2003; McDonald 1989; MacDonald 1993; Turner 1993; Werbner 1997)? This literature is far from homogeneous, and is indeed riven by a number of enduring disagreements. However, taken together, its main concern, as French sociologist Gabriel Tarde might have put it, is with the verb *to be* – and its negation. Both analytically and ethnographically, the anthropology of identity and difference is concerned with the emphatic *to be* of essentialism, the empty *not to be* of 'constructed' difference, and the various in-betweens of hybrid, processual, negotiated identities.

Another approach, which has emerged more recently, considers the primary focus of analysis to be not categories, but connections. Rooted in the anthropology of English notions of kinship (Strathern 1981; 1992), this approach connected head-on with the anthropology of 'identity' in an article by Jeanette Edwards (1998) on uses of the past in the Lancashire town of 'Alltown'. Edwards notes that 'Alltown people themselves constantly categorise each other in inclusive and exclusive ways' (1998: 155) as 'Alltown born and bred' versus 'incomers', or 'English' versus 'Irish'. For all that, the author argues that 'boundaries (albeit permeable) and their maintenance, are not suitable metaphors for what I wish to portray in Alltown' (1998: 154). Rather, 'belonging is forged through a variety of connections, and a diversity of attachments, which include links to pasts and persons, as well as to places' (1998: 148). Declining to treat 'Alltown born and bred', 'incomer', and 'Irish' analytically as 'ethnic' categories, Edwards recasts such categorical distinctions between people as one amongst various possible configurations of connections and disconnections: '[Ethnicity] emerges when links are made between people based on common places of origin, or particular patronyms, only to be screened out when an alternative (albeit sometimes overlapping) set of connections is mobilised in terms, for instance, of occupational histories or individual mobility' (1998: 163).

The crucial departure in Edwards's argument (compared to various other discussions of hybrid, fluid, or negotiated identities) is that 'belonging' does not primarily refer an individual to a *category* of identity confronted to another (an Other) category, but rather connects a person to other entities, human and non-human (persons, places, pasts, behaviours, etc.). People belong to places, to stories, and to other people (who by the same token belong to them) before they belong to a category. We have moved from categories and boundaries, to connections and attachments.

The parallel between this anthropology of belonging and Gabriel Tarde's discussions of possession is striking. Gabriel Tarde was a nineteenth-century sociologist 'rediscovered' by Gilles Deleuze and his followers (Alliez 1999; Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 267-8), and more recently by Bruno Latour, who sees in him a forgotten grandfather of the sociology of associations (Latour 2002; 2005). In explicit counterpoint to Durkheim, Tarde dismissed the notion of nations or social groups as autonomous superorganisms, and reduced them to their individual constituents (e.g. Tarde 1999 [1895]: 36). 'Beneath the indefinite they', Tarde notes, 'however carefully we search, we never find anything but a certain number of he's and she's which, as they have increased in number, have become mingled together and confused' (2000 [1899]: 25). So far, so unsurprising. Some commentators have taken such statements as indications that

Tarde was a theorist of individual agency, or a 'theorist of action' in the Parsonian sense (e.g. Terry Clark's introduction to Tarde 1969), and it is indeed with the accusation of individualism that Émile Durkheim famously dismissed Tardean sociology. More recent commentators have suggested, however, that this reading of Tarde was radically misconstrued (Barry & Thrift 2007; Latour 2002; Mucchielli 2000). For Tarde's next move, after reducing the 'big entities' to their individual human components, was to operate the same reduction on human individuals themselves, reducing them to their components, and reducing those again to their components and so on.

[T] hese prime elements at which each science arrives, the social individual, the living cell, the chemical atom, are prime only in view of their own specific science ... there is no way of stopping on this slope before we reach the infinitesimal which, unexpectedly, becomes the key to the whole universe (Tarde 2000 [1899]: 36-7).

Having operated this infinite regression, Tarde then rebuilds reality in terms of associations: every thing is a society, an atom or a solar system no less than a nation, and hence every science is a 'sociology'. The stuff of 'society' in this extended sense is what Tarde calls 'mutual possession'. Mutual possession applies equally to the ties that bind chemical elements one to another, to the gravitational force which makes planets into systems, to the complex division of labour of organs within the human body, or to relations between two or more human beings. Tarde's notion of 'possession', like his notion of 'society', is thus an extremely general term, a placeholder for multiple kinds of relation: legal, conceptual, chemical, biological, magnetic. Possession holds together the various elements which form societies, and society is nothing more than the mutual possession of each element by every other:

I possess my government, my religion, my police, as well as my specific human type, my temperament, my health; but I also know that the ministers of my country, the priests of my cult or the policemen of my district count me in the number of their flock, just as the human type, if it were to personify itself somewhere, would see in me no more that one of its particular variations (1999 [1895]: 86).

It is thus easy to see why Bruno Latour (2002) might lay claim to Tarde as a forgotten ancestor. Tardean entities are in fact networks of entities which are attached to each other in multiple ways. These entities can be human or non-human, material or ideal, big or small. As in Actor Network Theory, each Tardean entity in turn is itself a network, in an infinite, fractal regression – turtles all the way down. Following this programme, claims Tarde, sociology could finally displace Being from the pinnacle of philosophical speculation:

All of philosophy so far has been premised on the verb to be, whose definition seemed to be the philosopher's stone one should discover. One can say that, had it been premised on the verb to have, many sterile debates ... would have been avoided – From the principle I am, it is impossible to derive, with all the subtlety in the world, any existence besides my own; hence the negation of external reality. But if you postulate I have as the fundamental fact, then that which is had as well as that which has, are both given as inseparable (Tarde 1999 [1895]: 86, original emphasis).

We have thus returned to the relational constitution of entities. But importantly, we have not just moved from counting one to counting two. We have not moved from the isolated self to the self/other distinction so familiar to anthropologists. For Tarde, 'I am not' is just as mysterious and empty as 'I am'. It is precisely this opposition between self and other, me and not-me, which Tarde, in this passage, obviates. The shift from 'being' to 'having' makes entities open-ended, since every question of possession leads to another question of possession: 'Being, this empty abstraction, is never understood otherwise than as the property of something, of another being, itself composed of properties, and thus indefinitely on' (1999 [1895]: 86-7). In other words, the move from being to having is a move from counting one, or two, to counting n+1.

Tarde's opposition between being and having gives a powerful sense of what is at stake in the shift from 'identity' (categories) to 'belonging' (connections). In return, the grounding of this anthropological literature in an account of English kinship gives us an excellent critical vantage-point on Tarde. I will return to this point below, but let us first apply some of these theoretical insights to the question of Corsican sociality.

Knowing as mutual possession

One evening, a few days after my arrival in Crucetta, I walked, loaded with shopping bags, into the small local bar. I offered a meek 'Bonsoir' as I stepped into the doorway. Conversation ceased abruptly, and two dozen eyes turned on me. I mumbled that I would put down my bags by the door, and proceeded to do it, uncomfortably. Luckily, at that moment, Mr Frank, who had stayed outside to pee against a wall, came in behind me and the atmosphere lightened: I was with him. Laughter, jokes, greetings flew across the room as conversation resumed. I had met Mr Frank, a jovial 63-year-old, half an hour earlier, as we hitched a ride together from the nearby town of Île Rousse, where I had gone shopping. As he invited me for a drink in the bar, he said, 'Come, I'm going to make you known'. That was my first introduction to a word I was to encounter often in Crucetta, connaître, 'to know', used intransitively. As we sat in the bar, and the rounds followed each other, Mr Frank gave me a lecture on the importance of 'knowing'.

Him, there, he's the boss of the restaurant. Now, you know him. You can go eat over there, you'll pay less. If you just go like this, and you don't know anyone, they'll make you pay ... [signed: 'much more']. And now, if you go, you can eat well, drink well ... A lamb, you pay 200 francs for it if you know ... The people, if they know you, you're protected. You say, in Crucetta, you say, I know Mr so-and-so, Mr so-and-so, the people, they help you. If something happens to you, they're there, they help you.

Like a number of other European languages, but unlike English, French has two words for knowing: connaître and savoir. Whereas the latter, savoir, could be glossed as 'knowing that', the former, connaître, describes knowledge in the sense of acquaintance or familiarity: one knows, in this sense, a person, a story, a place, or a method. In standard French usage, both verbs are transitive. By contrast, in Crucetta I often heard connaître used intransitively in phrases such as 'here, you have to know' ('ici, il faut connaître'). Whatever its linguistic derivation, this intransitive version of knowing is more than a linguistic quirk; it enables people to express a particular notion of knowing as an open-ended activity. For instance, having attended my first village council meeting, I met one of the councillors who was helping to slaughter lambs in his father's cellar. He asked me what I had thought of the council, in which a passionate argument had arisen over a complex issue of land rights. I answered that I felt much of it had gone over my head. He answered with a smile: 'Of course, you don't know' ('Bien sur, tu connais pas').

Connaître in this sense implies knowing people, knowing people's business, and more generally the business of the village. As a result, 'intransitivity' is slightly

misleading. It is not that connaître becomes a true intransitive, indicating some form of knowledge in the abstract, something immanent or objectless. Rather, this is a form of pseudo-intransitivity: since no particular object is specified, this allows for 'knowing' to refer implicitly to a multiplicity of interconnected objects ('here you have to know'). To mute or suppress a direct referent (knowing *X*) is to open up a theoretically unlimited set of connections (knowing ...). Far from being 'intransitive', then, this use of knowing could well be described as 'hyper-transitive': connaître describes an activity of proliferating connection -n+1. And indeed, mapping, making, and remaking connections in conversation with a group of friends and neighbours was an activity which people in Crucetta appreciated in itself and were prepared to spend a great amount of time and effort doing. It would be quite common for someone who mentioned a person in passing as part of a story to be interrupted by the listeners: 'Which Jean? Jean the shepherd, or Catherine's Jean?' 'No, no, this is Jean the uncle of the one from the blue house!' 'From Lumio?' 'From the south. His wife was from Lumio.' 'Oh, so Jean Pietrone? 'Yes, Pietrone, I think he was called. His brother used to go hunting with my father, they called him "growler" '. 'His daughter is the one who married the old Damiani, isn't she?' And so on. Such discussions were always greeted with enthusiasm, and sometimes took over from the story itself.

We thus rejoin classic anthropological analyses of interpersonal knowledge, or 'interconnaissance', as the core of village sociality in France (Zonabend 1990) and in Corsica (Galibert 2004b: 34, 150; Meisterheim 1999: 9; Ravis-Giordani 1983), which describe the daily (re)construction of a common knowledge which is 'the semantic fabric without which no society can exist' (Galibert 2004b: 205). 'Village studies' have often been stigmatized for reifying the local or local culture (Boissevain 1975; Cole 1977; Grillo 1980; and, more recently, Gupta & Ferguson 1997). In fact they often did precisely the opposite: they grounded the seeming unity of a local object in actual traceable connections and relations, events and moments of a careful micro-sociology. On the question of 'knowing', furthermore, these anthropological analyses already prefigured the idea that common knowledge is more than simply the sum of what everyone knows, and not just a store of information replicated within the minds of a select group of 'insiders'. Neither of those metaphors captures the generative quality of such conversations, in which one might say that it is not just information that is distributed and redistributed across different minds, but rather a cognitive process itself, a process which spreads to include different people, but also things and places (see Candea 2008; Gell 1998; Hutchins 1996). Knowing, in this sense, ceases to be a question of representation, it goes beyond even the common social production of a purely semantic fabric, and becomes a question of belonging or mutual possession – the interrelationship of people, places, and stories into durable assemblages (cf. Candea 2008).³

The problem of interiority and the limits of Tardean extensions

To say this is to take seriously the resilience of the links between places, pasts, and persons, but this in turn restates in sharpened form a problem inherent in earlier anthropological discussions of 'interknowledge'. Indeed, in such analyses, 'interknowledge' effectively marks an interiority, 'the closed universe of the village community, in which links of interconnaissance powerfully insert the individual into the group' (Zonabend 1990: 260). This common knowledge produces the organic interpenetration of place, people, and history, 'the communitarian mental landscape in which the community re-identifies itself' (Galibert 2004b: 205, original emphasis). Therefore, in these

anthropological analyses, as in the popular English imagination, as described by Marilyn Strathern, 'villages are imagined as centers that remain fixed. They form a focus for long-term attachment, containing folk intermeshed in an intricate web of connections, each place a discrete unit looking outwards' (2004: 23; see also Strathern, 1981). This is not to say that such accounts necessarily turn on the fetishization of the kind of 'small-scale communities of face-to-face contact' of which anthropological critics have been so suspicious. On the contrary, we can see for instance in Galibert's ethnography of the Corsican village of Sarrola Carcopino through the letters and writings of one of its inhabitants turned colonial soldier in the late nineteenth century, that 'interconnaissance' can span continents and be mediated through letters from Madagascar negotiating the marriage of a cousin back in the village (Galibert 2004b). But even in this case, this 'interknowledge' maps an inside, an interiority which is all the more impenetrable for not being straightforwardly spatialized, a village carried within oneself to the ends of the world.

This is also where anthropological discussions of belonging take off from Tarde's somewhat optimistic description of ever-expanding chains of mutual possession – the kinds of claims which make him so appealing to Actor Network Theorists. An important contribution of Edwards and Strathern's (2000) article on English conceptions of kinship is precisely to show how far these have come to infuse Euro-American *academic* reflection on connection and relatedness with the warm and benign overtones of ties as inherently productive and generative: '[T]he potential extensiveness of genealogical connection is one among the several global extensions (such as information, desire, consumerism, technology) that Euro-American academics imagined operating against external rather than internal limits' (2000: 158).

Tarde, too, hoped to replace the immobilities of Being with ever-expanding networks of mutual possession. But his occasionally refreshing disregard for conventional distinctions between social, biological, material, and psychological phenomena also led him to make some statements which few social scientists today would endorse. Against Durkheim's attempt radically to separate the social from the biological, for instance, Tarde adamantly insists, in one essay, on the continuing importance of shared 'blood' for the solidity of social groups, alongside attachments based on co-residence, shared belief, and common interest (Tarde 1895). This particular passage suggests that Tarde, just like the informants in Edwards and Strathern's account of English kin reckoning, takes 'shared biological substance' at face value as something which really binds individuals together, alongside relations of sympathy, love, or co-residence. And as Edwards and Strathern point out, this mutual implication of biological and social claims is precisely what gives English kin reckoning a self-limiting, rather than open-ended, character: '[S]ocial and biological claims of the English kind, each endlessly ramifying in themselves, serve equally to link and to truncate one another' (2000: 159, original emphasis).

Similarly in Crucetta the social networks of *knowing* were intimately entwined with connections deemed to be more 'substantive'. Thus the commonplace statement 'here everyone knows each other' (the 'here' might be the village, a cluster of villages, or indeed the island itself, and was often expressed in opposition to an 'elsewhere' which usually implicitly or explicitly referred to continental France) was often associated with another, more specific claim to the effect that 'here we are all related' (*simu tutti parenti*). This propensity of knowledge and relatedness to collapse upon one another was evident in a controversial court case in 2002, in which two Corsican men were

accused of murder and the prosecution had provided evidence based on mitochondrial DNA. In the end, however, after taking expert advice, the judge ruled that the evidence was not sufficient. He commented, in court:

Here we have a factor which is specific to Corsica. It seems that on this island, everyone knows each other more or less. You are all a bunch of clones! I'm exaggerating, but it really is quite astounding. Corsicans who know nothing of their family connections, and don't know each other, have the same genetic footprint, which is rather vexing (quoted in Chemin 2002).

The judge's comments – which sparked outraged reactions amongst Corsican as well as Continental commentators – resonate with French concerns about Corsican secrecy, in which Corsica is unknowable, unclear, because of the excessive entanglements and connections amongst its elements: Corsicans all 'know' each other, the judge is complaining, which is why it is impossible to 'know' who is who, to disentangle them from one another, even with the help of the most recent technology. The judge's statement stands as a powerful instance of the multiple entanglements between knowing and relatedness (Strathern 2005).

Thus if belonging connects, it can also exclude: on the horizon of seemingly benign claims to ever-expanding relationship lie, paradoxically, the most familiar dangers of ethnicized exclusion. And so we also discover that Tarde, in some respects the antiessentialist par excellence, can at times be found making ostensibly primordialist claims to the effect that national sentiment derives from shared 'race' (Tarde 1895). If inventive reappropriations of some of Tarde's thinking by theorists such as Bruno Latour, Nigel Thrift, and others have been, and continue to be, so productive, it is precisely because they do not amount to a simple wholesale 'revival' of a sociology which includes such a paradoxical combination of prescient formulations, on the one hand, and, on the other, of typically nineteenth-century scientific and political concerns (Barry & Thrift 2007: 510-11; Candea 2010).

But even Tarde's primordialist 'dark side' is heuristically useful insofar as it highlights the dark side of 'interknowledge' itself. Interconnaissance is no more intrinsically benign than connections are intrinsically a 'good thing'. The networks spanned by 'knowing' could shift situationally from inclusivity to exclusivity: if 'we all know each other' could effortlessly and silently stretch to include Continentals, for instance, 'we are all related' usually did not. It was neither one, nor the other, but rather the constitutive ambiguity between the two, which gave the interiorities of interknowledge their experiential conviction and resilience.

The logic of anonymous introductions

As I have argued in the previous section, this interiority of a network in which every element possesses/belongs to every other provides a very powerful account of the content, resilience, and persuasion of what is commonly rendered as 'identity' - rather too powerful, in fact, since it makes it difficult to see how anyone might ever 'get in'. The problem for a newcomer in Crucetta is where to begin making connections when every connection refers you to something else. Where, in other words, does one 'pick up the thread'? Pollock and Maitland write: 'Such is the unity of all history that anyone who endeavours to tell a piece of it must feel that his first sentence tears a seamless web' (1898, quoted in Thornton 1988: 299). Such is the problem of a newcomer in Crucetta, and in many other places besides. How does one become someone who knows? How

does one become known? This is the double problem which, I will argue, the specific form of 'anonymous introductions' can solve.

The notion of an 'anonymous introduction' seems strange, indeed oxymoronic, due to the commonsense assumption that an introduction is primarily a means for two persons to learn facts about each other – it does indeed seem strange in this context to omit what should be the crucial fact, namely the interlocutors' names. But one could also think of introductions as relational events which transform people who did not know each other into people who do. That this involves more, or indeed in some cases less, than an exchange of factual information becomes particularly obvious when introductions take on an extremely formalized aspect, such as, for instance, in the admissions ceremony for fellows of King's College in Cambridge, which requires newly admitted fellows to stand in line while all the existing fellows (in recent years, over a hundred) file by and shake hands with each in turn, introducing themselves by name. It is not expected, of course, that the new fellows will remember the names which are fired at them in quick succession, or even necessarily that the existing fellows will remember those of the new recruits. The event is rather part of a broader process which turns a person into a fellow.

This extreme example highlights a formal property of *all* introductions based on an exchange of names: they first acknowledge a disconnection, in order formally and explicitly to create a connection. To return to Pollock and Maitland's formulation, such introductions go right ahead and tear the seamless web, in order to suture it back together. By contrast, 'anonymous introductions' do precisely the opposite. They 'loop in' the *inconnu* (the one who is not known) by working out the chain of connections that link this person to his or her interlocutor. The initial disconnection between the interlocutors is not foregrounded or formalized as in a direct exchange of names; it is held in abeyance until an underlying connection can be established. At the end of this process, what emerges is that the interlocutors had in fact been 'connected' all along. The web remains seamless, and so the problem has disappeared.

In Tardean terms, one might say that rather than begin by postulating *I am*, anonymous introductions work through a whole series of *I have*s until they elicit some form of mutual possession between the two parties. Whereas, as Tarde notes, postulating 'I am' turns the existence of the other (the not-me) into a problem (who *are* you?), beginning with 'I have' premises the self on a set of connections; it opens a chain of connections which are explored until some form of mutual possession is 'discovered'. Anonymous introductions allow this mutual possession to predate and pre-empt the direct opposition between self and other.

In his analysis of name-avoidance amongst Korowai-speakers of southern West Papua, Rupert Stasch has argued that 'name utterance is avoided because to utter the other's name would be to refer to the other in a manner emphasizing that person's existence as a singular being whom the speaker apprehends as an object independent of the existing dyadic tie' (2002: 347). Persons thus emerge as secondary or derivative, 'metonymic extrusions of social dyads' (2002: 342). I would argue that a similar logic is at play here, although one would have to replace dyads with myriads: anonymous introductions make the person secondary, not to the self-other distinction, but to a multiplicity of connections, some of which already bind the interlocutors to one another.

This is quite consistent with classic anthropological accounts of Corsican personhood, in which the individual is portrayed as the flip-side or coalescence of a social network of kinship and friendship (e.g. Gil 1984). We do not need to conclude from this that Corsicans do not imagine persons to be singular beings (any more than Korowaispeakers operate with a single – relational – model of personhood; Stasch 2002: 355); rather in Corsica, as in (the rest of) France, West Papua, or Mongolia (Humphrey 2008), multiple models of what it is to be a person coexist. In this case, we might think of anonymous introductions as allowing one way of 'doing' personhood to be bracketed in favour of another.

The anonymity thus becomes a way to perpetuate a polite fiction: the fiction that everyone is already connected to everyone else, that 'here, we all know each other'. To open by either stating one's name or asking for a name would be to puncture this fiction and imply that one's interlocutor does not know and/or that they are not known. This was my neighbour Cécile's cardinal sin. Anonymous introductions avoid this unpleasantness by bracketing the question of one's name and searching instead for a third term somewhere else - just as Mr Frank was the third term between me and the other people in the bar. And in the process anonymous introductions actually transform the interlocutors into persons who know; not just persons who know each other, but persons who know in the open-ended sense described above. Thus the fiction (that we already knew each other) becomes reality. The initial indirectness is key here, since by blocking a straightforward exchange of names it opens up what could be a simple binary into a proliferation of other connections.

Lest there be any confusion, I should reiterate that this progressive emplotment of an outsider into an existing web of interknowledge is not necessarily a benign, warmly inclusive process, or one which erases differences of status or origin. It is implicitly expected, for instance, that the person marked out as an outsider will produce more information about themselves than their 'local' interlocutor. Furthermore, some connections, as I suggested above, are limiting, objectifying; others will be politely skirted around, others again concealed. In this sense the classic anthropological concern with secrecy and diffidence is quite apposite, particularly when these introductions are played out in public. As the exchange progresses, the interlocutors are increasingly located, defined, and limited, situated by acquaintances, places, status, wealth, knowledge, and so forth. Anonymous introductions do not resolve these differences, they do not annul the hierarchies and the politics, they do not stop these various categories from counting. They might begin to make you local in a 'we all know each other' kind of way, but they will not make you 'Corsican' – at least to the many in Crucetta who see this as a substantial, 'we are all related' kind of category (on the problem of 'becoming Corsican', see Candea 2010). Anonymous introductions simply offer a solution to one particular problem: how to make connections without acknowledging disconnection? Their indirectness, in which the question of being is initially bracketed, open up what Deleuze and Guattari might describe as a ligne de fuite, an internal horizon within the otherwise hermetic web of 'interknowledge'.

N + 1

We can now track this same indirectness in other encounter situations. Speaking of the streets and squares of 'the traditional Corsican village', Ravis-Giordani paints a striking picture:

No stranger would dare enter this space without a specific reason for doing so. He could not bear the incongruity of his situation for long. This is precisely because he is not in a space which is open to all. And this space which is both common to all the neighbours and closed to foreigners is indeed the first definition of the village (1983: 182).

This remains resonant with many an *inconnu*'s experience in Crucetta today. For a tourist or first-time visitor, passing through the smaller squares or alleys can sometimes feel like running the gauntlet: conversation usually stops at your approach and fixed stares follow you in and out of view. Sometimes a curt nod or half-smile rewards your attempt at a greeting. But perhaps the most unnerving is the muttering as you leave. An understanding of Corsican makes it no more amiable, as the words are usually: 'Who's that one?' (*'Di quale hè què?'*).

During fieldwork, I progressively shifted from being the inconnu who was stared at, to being one of those sitting with friends and staring at hapless tourists - in the neighbourhood which, through the very same set of processes, was becoming 'my own'. From this later vantage-point, I came to see that the very same 'indirectness' was at play in this situation as in the anonymous introductions. When someone who was not known entered a square, alley, or bar in which there were already two or more people, a direct question as to his or her identity was very rare. It was much more usual to ask someone else present who this newcomer was. Often the companion of the person who enquired would answer: 'You know, he's the nephew of Marie-Josée', or 'They're the ones who're renting at Mme Mattei's'. At that point, if the person in question was still within hearing, he could complete the introduction himself ('Yes, that's right, I'm back for the summer'), or merely join in to the conversation. As with the anonymous introductions, these encounters are premised on indirectness. The indirectness here is of a more obvious kind: it involves asking a third party 'who you are', rather than confronting you with the question; however, it does the same work of 'looping in', by attempting to discover a 'pre-existing' connection (he knows you and I know him ...), rather than explicitly marking a disconnection.

The indirectness is present, too, in the very expression which is used to enquire about someone's identity: *di quale hé*, literally translates as 'of whom is that'. The counterparts of this question are naming expressions such as 'Ghjaseppu di Matteu', or 'Marie di Ghjuvan-Pasquà', where 'of' (*di*) refers to a relation. Formally, '*di*' is used to refer the person to their father, but it can also be used in a much looser and more contextual way, to specify someone by reference to another person or place (as in 'Saveriu di Sant'Antoninu'). In asking '*di quale hè?*', one onlooker is asking of another, effectively, to whom can I connect this third person? To whom does he belong?

But names themselves are no end-point. For names, too, refer persons to other persons. In Corsica as elsewhere in Europe, patronyms are inherited in the male line, but Christian names, too, are transmitted from family members (Ravis-Giordani 1983: 371-2). The level of homonymy is such that a name in and of itself is often meaningless unless one can further contextualize it, replace it within the series and connections within which it signifies.

The indirectness of anonymous introductions is thus repeated and amplified in a number of other contexts: in encounters on the public square, in the very form of questions about identity, in the attribution of meaning to names. Indirectness upon indirectness upon indirectness. Each query concerning identity is refracted into a question of connections, and each connection traced prompts a further connection: n+1.

Coda: anthropology as anonymous introduction?

My account of anonymous introductions in this article has thus been diametrically opposed to the popular explanations with which I started: far from being evidence of Corsican closedness or secrecy, such moments of name-avoidance, I have argued, might be seen on the contrary as the precise instant when a gap opens through which an outsider can start to become an insider. Perhaps, as Derrida (1997) suggests, not asking for a name is here the pinnacle of hospitality. By bracketing identity, anonymous introductions allow for connection to emerge not through difference, but before it. This form of indirectness which obviates the self-other opposition, reverberates in other practices of relationality in Crucetta, through which people become persons who know and who are known, while identity opens up onto belonging in a proliferating logic of n+1. And since belonging, like identity, can produce its own ethnicized closures, the anonymous introduction is one of the ways in which, in concrete encounter situations, this closure can be deferred.

In order to outline this argument clearly against more familiar literature on dualism, identity, and secrecy, however, I have rather run the risk of overstating the case. I am in no way suggesting we forget the long tradition of self-other dualism in the anthropology of Corsica and the Mediterranean. My analysis of anonymous introductions just burns a small hole into this broader picture, a contained space in which relationality is turned on its head, a ligne de fuite which completes just as it challenges the bigger picture. But it remains undoubtedly the case, as my initial example indeed suggests, that the very same encounter which can open up a space for relationality in this way can also become a vector of schismogenesis, when people read each other's proprieties of behaviour through the frame of cultural difference. This in turn, and in conclusion, poses a problem of anthropological description.

Having developed an early and admittedly rather crude version of this argument while still in the field, I ran it past Jeanne, a continental friend in the village, when she brought up the question of Corsican 'closedness' to foreigners. Amongst other things, she had referred to the type of 'encounter' situation described above, and held it up, in a manner quite familiar to anthropologists, as an archetypal moment, a vignette which reveals something profound about Corsican cultural logics. 'Corsicans', she argued, don't come forward to 'greet' you; on the contrary, 'they observe you, they talk about you, they judge you'.

The paradox will not be lost on the reader: I have been arguing in this article that the indirectness of such moments works as a polite way of obviating opposition, of looping a newcomer into an existing assemblage of people and things without marking their disconnection too starkly in the first place, that it allows connections to proliferate and is the very process whereby one can slowly become someone who knows and who is known. But here, it is this very same indirectness of the encounter which Jeanne was singling out as proof of 'their' difference from 'us'.

The paradox is in part a problem of anthropological convention. When I described my analysis to Jeanne, I cast it in the classic anthropological idiom (precisely the one I tried to avoid in the opening pages of this article): I presented 'anonymous introductions' as a Corsican cultural feature, with its specific rules and rituals, to which she as a non-Corsican failed to conform. As a result, Jeanne's sense of Corsican closedness was, if anything, reinforced: this may be the Corsican way of doing things, she agreed, but it's still not 'real' hospitality, it's not 'normal'. Normal, Jeanne claimed, was to go towards the newcomer, to talk directly. She said she had often been a newcomer in

villages on the French mainland, and this was what happened. So my anthropological account only fed into the binary opposition: 'the Corsican', she concluded, 'isn't open. He's closed'.

In other words, I was doing the opposite of an anonymous introduction. The introductions I have been describing bracket the label one should give to one's interlocutor in order to let other connections proliferate. My anthropological account of them had done precisely the opposite: it had begun by *labelling* anonymous introductions as a Corsican thing and thereby foreclosed various possibilities for Jeanne to relate to them. A story about ways of relating became a story about how different Corsicans were from her.

Could we imagine an anthropology which avoided this pitfall, by modelling itself on anonymous introductions? This would involve destabilizing one of the central principles of anthropological knowledge-making: the reference to a named human population. From the beginning of this article I have done my best to elude one question, which some will consider crucial: where does this type of relational knowledge operate? As one anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this argument noted, it is unclear how far, ethnographically speaking, *connaître* is supposed to extend: after all, the reviewer noted, what is being described here is not uncommon to other Mediterranean island contexts.

There is no straightforward answer to this question: people in Spain also ask each other 'of whom are you?' (;de quien eres?) ... so is this indeed a 'Mediterranean' story? But there is more: Marcel Proust describes the importance of knowing in very similar terms in the fictional (and yet recognizably 'French') town of Combray; very similar plays on names to those in Crucetta have been described in the Bourguignon village of 'Minot' described by Zonabend and others (Zonabend 1990); some of the naming practices discussed here are inflected by Catholicism; in ways which I have not had time to explore, Edwards and Strathern's account of English kinship is so apposite as to suggest that much of what I have been describing here could be glossed as 'Euro-American' (Edwards & Strathern 2000); some might even be tempted to go further, and try to find in the similarity between this case and Stasch's account of West Papua something even more fundamental about human relationality (Stasch 2002). All of these framings, and many, many more, are plausible. Some are perhaps more plausible than others, but at the limit, any such zoning will be arbitrary, a matter of excluding certain elements or including others. To paraphrase Annemarie Mol, '[T]he possibilities of contextualization are endless. They can be piled up to the point where the material analyzed here can be said to come from [Crucetta] and [Crucetta] alone' (Mol 2002: 183; see also Galibert 2004b: 217-18).

Maybe putting it like this (foregrounding singularities and extensions, rather than cultural labels) would have made it clearer to Jeanne how she could 'relate' to anonymous introductions, how she was already 'related' to them. And yet such indeterminacy goes against some of our deepest and most ingrained disciplinary instincts, which prompt us to ask, like my reviewer: yes, but to which group is this account relevant? Of whom is it representative? Anthropologists have long been suspicious of the notion of 'cultural packages, coherent inside and different from what is elsewhere' (Mol 2002: 80). And yet, it still somehow remains the case that an account which refuses to specify its 'context' in terms of a named population ('amongst the X') will necessarily appear incomplete or inconclusive. Even though we have profoundly excoriated assumptions about the boundedness of cultures or social groups, named human populations

remain, in almost every case, the mechanism whereby anthropological knowledge progresses past the anecdotal.

We unquestionably need a language in which to talk about the fact that Jeanne's understanding of what should be expected in a first meeting with strangers differed from Saveriu's, for instance, in a way that is not reducible to individual idiosyncracy. While ascribing these differences to their respective 'cultures' has so far worked as a convenient epistemological and political firebreak against the denial of the differences which matter to people, we know that it is an insufficient shorthand. The question – and this is very much an honest question, not a rhetorical one – is whether this is a problem intrinsic to anthropology, which, if it is to avoid becoming the differencedenying study of 'Man', must in all cases remain the study of 'cultures' (or indeed 'ontologies', or whatever) mapped onto named groups of people. Or might this alternative be obviated through a reconfiguration of the discipline such that difference is not stabilized at the level of cultural entities (with sameness 'inside') but rather emerges at all manner of scales from the very making of relations (Strathern 2005; Viveiros de Castro 2003)?

NOTES

This paper has been a long time in the writing. It originated as a Ph.D. thesis chapter on the subject of 'knowing', and has since undergone various mutations over the years. As a result, it has benefited from the input of more people than I can satisfactorily name here, but I would particularly like to acknowledge the salutary comments of Christina Toren (orally at the St Andrews Senior seminar), Marilyn Strathern, Jeanette Edwards, James Laidlaw, Martin Holbraad, Bruno Latour, Piers Vitebsky, and three anonymous reviewers for JRAI. From version to version, many imperfections and errors have been sloughed off thanks to the efforts of this helpful collective. All remaining faults are mine alone.

- ¹ 'Crucetta' is a pseudonym, as are all the personal names in this article. For discussion of Crucetta as an 'arbitrary location', rather than a taken-for-granted 'village fieldsite', see Candea (2007).
 - ² I am grateful to one anonymous *JRAI* reviewer for putting forward this suggestion.
 - ³ For an excellent account of 'knowing' in an English case, see Degnen (2008).

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Présentations anonymes : identité et appartenance en Corse

Résumé

Le présent article commence par une énigme ethnographique : pourquoi est-il fréquent, dans un village du Nord de la Corse, que des inconnus qui se rencontrent pour la première fois se présentent sans donner leur nom? L'énigme se dénoue avec l'aide de travaux récents sur l'anthropologie de l'appartenance, combinés à des idées choisies du sociologue Gabriel Tarde. Commençant comme un récit de rationalité et de personnalité en Corse, l'article devient une reconfiguration de l'approche anthropologique de l'identité et de la différence, à travers le prisme de l'appel de Tarde à remplacer la problématique de « l'être » par un examen des manières « d'avoir ». Ces « présentations anonymes », qui mettent entre parenthèses l'identité personnelle pour mettre en lumière les liens, sont considérées comme un modèle d'heuristique anthropologique reconfigurée.

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